

Classification: Phylum: Chordata; Class: Reptilia; Order: Squamata; Family Gekkonidae; Genus: *Phelsuma*



Scientific name: *Phelsuma ornata*

Common name: Ornate day gecko, Vinson's gecko, Lézard vert, Lézard couleur.

Distinguishing features: Small green lizard, with black and white stripes behind the eyes, a red 'T' marking between the eyes; males' usually brighter blue green with blue tail, females' usually a duller green to brown.

Distribution & habitat: many of the offshore islands, but also coastal lowland Mauritius, preferring native coastal vegetation, particularly vacoas and palms, but also frequently on buildings.

Biology

Size: average 10cm total length (half of which is tail).

Weight: average 4g.

Lifespan: in the wild, approximately 3yrs.

Clutch size: 2 eggs.

Incubation: approximately 55 to 65 days depending upon the temperature.

Maturity: Usually within their first year depending upon growth.

Diet: Prefer moths, cockroaches and spiders, but also fruit, nectar, tree-resin and occasionally smaller reptiles.

Behaviour: Mostly active in the day and are arboreal; spending most of their time up within the vegetation. They have good eyesight and will run after their prey once it is spotted or run and hide from approaching predators. At midday they often sit at the base of trees waiting for prey to wander pass on the ground. Breeding starts September/October and eggs are deposited in crevices/cavities of rocks, trees or palms where they are glued into position; young hatch mostly from December ready for the rains and an influx of food. There is no parental care. Their skink colour changes with mood and/or temperature being darker when they are cold or stressed.

Conservation work: Populations have declined in Mauritius, because of urbanisation, loss of native coastal forests and the introduction of predators and other gecko competitors. Restoration of the native forest on Ile aux Aigrettes has led to a five-fold increase in the day gecko population.

Other interesting facts: These geckos have toe pads, which allow them to walk across any incline, even upside down; their grip is one of the strongest known in the animal kingdom. This particular species is an important pollinator of many of the endangered Mauritian plants and on the mainland it also represents a major prey item for the endemic Mauritius kestrel in lowland areas. These geckos are cold blooded, needing the warmth of the sun for their bodies to operate. They are therefore often seen basking in the sun to warm up, but not for so long that they overheat, usually avoiding the midday sun. As with most lizards these geckos can drop their tails to evade predation or an aggressive interaction. Tails do grow back, but requires extra food and is therefore a burden to the lizard.

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