

LOUISIANA CRITTER CORNER

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MEDITERRANEAN GECKO

Mediterranean geckos are one of seven lizard species in Louisiana. While they were made famous by the lizardlike character in the Geico insurance advertisements, the real life Mediterranean gecko is far from a fan favorite among homeowners in our state.

Mediterranean geckos are not found naturally in any part of the United States. As the common name implies, these creatures are native to the Mediterranean regions of Europe. The first geckos to enter Louisiana probably came by cargo ships that unloaded at the port of New Orleans. Their entry is speculated to have occurred around 1945.

Geckos have the ability to hide in cracks and crevices of structures, allowing them to survive during the occasional subfreezing weather that hits the area. Although it is seldom that an introduced species does not displace any native species with similar habitat requirements, the Mediterranean gecko is an exception.

Geckos are unique because they are nocturnal insect feeders that live on the sides of buildings. They usually are no greater than 5 inches long, and their most characteristic identifying features are the scattered dark spots on a light-colored, warty dorsum. The nearly transparent body, along with large lidless eyes and pads at the end of each toe, give the animal an almost pre-historic looking appearance.

Since entering Louisiana, these geckos have spread across the state, although their numbers are much greater in the southern parishes. They are almost exclusively associated with human structures, becoming active at night on the



Mediterranean geckos

walls of buildings, patios and window screens. They tend to be especially active where lights attract insects, such as at windows. Females generally produce two hard-shelled eggs per clutch, with two or three clutches produced each year.

Mediterranean geckos, probably more than any other lizard species, tend to bring out unfounded fears, although these creatures really don't pose a threat to humans. Their strange appearance is likely the reason homeowners often insist that all individuals must be eradicated from around the home or workplace. The gecko's diet of roaches, flies, ants, mosquitoes, spiders and bugs, however, actually should make it a welcomed resident around our homes.

As with all amphibians and reptiles, there are no poisons labeled for controlling Mediterranean geckos. Outside populations should be left intact because of the benefits they provide. For those that find their way inside the home, capture is easily accomplished by placing glue boards (glue traps) in locations where the critters have been spotted.

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