



## Helmeted Iguanas (*Corytophanes spp.*)

## Casque Headed Iguanas (*Laemanctus spp.*)

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### **Hard Headed and Heroic**

Also known as the “forest chameleons”, the helmeted iguanas consist of a genus of about two to three, medium sized, arboreal iguanid species indigenous to Mexico, and throughout much of Central America and into much of South America. These largely arboreal lizards spend much of their time climbing, basking, and seeking refuge within bushes, low branches, and tree trunks, and can be quite variable in appearance and coloration. The most commonly seen helmeted iguana species, *Corytophanes cristatus*, is a medium sized iguanid lizard with a somewhat slender, laterally compressed body and long limbs, and a tall, bilateral crest, or helmet atop their heads and napes of their necks followed by a shorter dorsal crest or row of spines. The casque headed iguanas, which are similarly related species, also consist of about two to three species, with the most common being the Eastern Casque Headed Iguana, *Laemanctus longipes*. Casque headed iguanas, however, are much more slender than their related species, and have a smaller helmet or crest than do helmeted iguanas. Coloration of both species can vary from various browns, greens, olive, to gray, usually with darker markings, crossbands, or stripes. Males of both tend to have larger helmets than females. Although the care and biology is similar to other basilisks, these unique and enjoyable lizards can make for great additions to the terrarium for the more intermediate level enthusiast!

### **Taxonomy**

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum/Sub Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Reptilia

**Order:** Squamata

**Suborder:** Lacertilia

**Infraorder:** Iguania

**Family:** Corytophanidae

**Genus:** *Corytophanes* and *Laemanctus*

**Species:** *Corytophanes spp.* \* and *Laemanctus spp.*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

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In captivity, if they are provided the proper care, helmeted and casque headed iguanas can attain potential longevity of at least 10 to 15 years or more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

Both helmeted and casque iguanas are indigenous to the tropical to sub-tropical rainforests, woodlands, and forests of Mexico, through Honduras and much of Central America, and into South America, such as northern Colombia in the case of helmeted iguanas, where they occupy the low branches, shrubs, tree trunks, and other vegetation of these environments.

### **Conservation Status**

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

### **Legal and Regulatory Status(\*Subject to Change)**

Consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Helmeted and casque headed iguanas range from about 3 to 4 inches as hatchlings and juveniles, and anywhere from 10 to 16 inches typically for helmeted iguanas, and up to 22 to 24 inches for casque headed iguanas.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling iguanas can be housed in a 20 gallon tall terrarium or enclosure. Depending on the size of adult specimens of each species, a minimum of a 50 gallon or larger enclosure that is at least three feet by five feet by four feet. These iguanas of all ages and sizes will do best on a particulate substrate that retains humidity well such as pesticide free potting soil, cypress mulch, coconut fiber, or peat/sphagnum moss, as well as mixtures thereof. Misting and/or soaking hatchlings, juveniles, and adults at least two to three times weekly for 15 to 20 minutes will also help raise their hydration and humidity. A large, shallow water bowl or dish should also be provided and be changed and cleaned regularly. These iguanas are highly arboreal lizards, and appreciate additional climbing, hiding, and basking opportunities. Provide sufficient and ample artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs or sturdy branches, and maintain humidity at about 80% overall.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure. Ideal temperatures for these iguanas range from 80 to 85 degrees F on the cool and ambient temperatures and around 90 to 95 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of these iguanas in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other health and development maladies. Also be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

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## **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Insectivorous to Omnivorous***; In the wild, these iguanas are insectivorous to omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. They will eat an assortment of insects and other invertebrates, fruit and vegetable material, and even other small vertebrates on occasion. In captivity, feed these iguanas a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. They can eat other feeder items such as small pre-killed rodents, but offer these sparingly. They can also be given a mixed assortment of chopped up vegetables including carrots, peas, collard, mustard, and dandelion greens, and beans. Several commercially available omnivore mix diets are also available. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. They also require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation 1 to 2 times weekly or as otherwise directed for optimal health and development. This is in order to prevent Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) and other growth and nutritional deficiencies. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

## **Handling**

As with many reptiles, hatchling and juvenile iguanas often tend to be initially more nervous and defensive. Handle your iguana gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Overall, many of these species tend to be somewhat more skittish, fast moving, and flighty lizards than many other popular species in captivity when it comes to handling, but they can become accustomed to and tolerate some levels of handling by the more intermediate enthusiast or pet owner. Adult iguanas can become impressive and attractive medium sized display animals as well.

**\*\*Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens\*\***

## **Contact**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at [info@madisonherps.org](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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