

Recommended Annual Husbandry Schedule

Pristidactylus achalensis - Achala copper lizard

Identity and habitat

A saxicolous endemic of Pampa de Achala and Cerro Champaqui in the Sierras Grandes of Cordoba, Argentina, generally around 1,800-2,500+ m. It basks on exposed rock outcrops and retreats into deep crevices and belowground refuges.

Thermal biology

High-altitude and cool-running. A classic thermoregulation study reported mean active body temperature about 25.7 C, substrate about 24.0 C and air about 18.2 C, with a broad preferred range extending into the low-mid 30s. Use local rock heat, not warm room air.

Moisture and reproduction

Warm months are the rainy active season; winter is cold and dry. Park monitoring reports midday RH averaging about 54%, but fog/rain can drive brief saturation. Oviparous; large eggs over 20 mm are reported, apparently about three per clutch. Exact laying/incubation data remain limited.

MONTH	DAY AMBIENT	NIGHT	BASKING	UVI*	PHOTOPERIOD	RH DAY / NIGHT*	SPRAY / RAIN	FOOD OFFERS*	STATUS / BREEDING
January	8-12 C	2-5 C	Off	Off	8.5 h	35-50 / 45-60%	None	None	Winter hibernation
February	8-12 C	2-5 C	Off	Off	9 h	35-50 / 45-60%	None	None	Winter hibernation
March	12-16 C	4-7 C	30-32 C limited	1-2	10 h	40-55 / 55-70%	Localized light spray every 10-14 d	1-2 late	Staged emergence
April	15-18 C	6-9 C	32-34 C	2-3	11 h	45-60 / 60-75%	2 light sprays/wk	2-3	Breeding season begins
May	17-20 C	8-11 C	33-35 C	3	12.5 h	45-60 / 60-75%	2-3 sprays/wk	3-4	Peak mating / territoriality
June	18-21 C	9-12 C	33-35 C	3	14 h	50-65 / 65-80%	2-3 sprays/wk	3-4	Gravid females expected
July	19-22 C	10-13 C	33-35 C	3-4	14.5 h	50-65 / 65-80%	2-3 sprays/wk + moist nest	3-4	Probable nesting window
August	18-21 C	9-12 C	32-34 C	3	13.5 h	50-65 / 65-80%	2-3 sprays/wk	3-4	Late nesting / recovery
September	16-19 C	7-10 C	31-33 C	2-3	12 h	45-60 / 60-75%	2 light sprays/wk	2-3	Late active period
October	13-17 C	5-8 C	30-32 C limited	1-2	10.5 h	40-55 / 55-70%	Light spray weekly	1-2	Autumn taper
November	9-13 C	3-6 C	Off	Off / 1	9 h	35-50 / 45-60%	None	Stop after gut clears	Cooling / hibernation
December	8-12 C	2-5 C	Off	Off	8.5 h	35-50 / 45-60%	None	None	Winter hibernation

Climate translation: wild activity occurs mainly October-April during the warm rainy season, with hibernation through the cold dry May-September period. This table shifts that annual cycle by about six months for Northern Hemisphere management.

* RH, UVI and spray values are captive working targets. Pampa de Achala is not continuously humid: summer rain, fog and wet meadows alternate with strong wind and rapid surface drying; winter is markedly drier.

Thermal note: prioritize a broad cool gradient and sun-like local rock basking. The species is eurythermal; avoid desert-style whole-enclosure heat.

Practical Husbandry and Daily Management

High-altitude rocky-grassland husbandry: cool air, secure crevices, local basking, seasonal summer rain and a genuine dry winter rest.

Enclosure and refuge design

For one adult, about 120 x 70 x 60 cm or larger is a practical starting point. Build a stable rockscape with broad basking slabs, multiple deep crevices, shaded retreats and a cooler humid refuge. Rocks must be supported from the enclosure base rather than balanced on loose substrate. Fine turf/grass clumps and sparse alpine vegetation can be used, but the main functional structure is fractured rock.

Heat, light and UVB

Maintain cool enclosure air and create heat mainly at one or two sun-like rock surfaces. During peak activity use roughly 33-35 C surface basking while most air remains around 17-21 C. A measured UVI around 3 at the best basking position is a reasonable working target, with deep shade and crevices below UVI 1. Avoid keeping the entire enclosure warm.

RH, rain and ventilation

Pampa de Achala has a rainy warm season and dry winter. Park monitoring reports average midday RH about 53.6%, with occasional extremes near 10% in late dry periods and near 100% during rain/fog. In captivity, use moderate RH with 2-3 light active-season sprays weekly, allowing exposed rock to dry quickly. Maintain one slightly more humid retreat; do not keep the whole substrate wet.

Winter cooling

Wild animals hibernate through the cold dry season. Cool only healthy animals after feeding has stopped and the gut has cleared. The schedule uses conservative captive nights around 2-6 C and days around 8-13 C, with basking off. Check mass and hydration periodically. Reverse cooling if an animal loses excessive mass or develops respiratory or neurologic signs.

Diet

Primarily insectivorous. Offer varied gut-loaded crickets, roaches, locusts, beetles/larvae and other appropriately sized invertebrates. Small amounts of safe leafy plant material can be offered because minor vegetal intake has been reported. Cannibalism has been documented in the wild, so do not house juveniles with large adults.

Feeding rhythm

Feed leanly through emergence, increase during breeding and female egg production, then reduce through the autumn taper. Stop food early enough before hibernation for complete digestion. Resume slowly after consistent basking and normal digestion are established.

Social management

The species is territorial and aggressive, especially during the short spring reproductive season. Individual housing is safest as a default. For breeding introductions, provide duplicate basking/refuge sites and supervise closely. Separate immediately for biting, repeated pursuit, refuge exclusion, suppressed feeding or weight loss.

Daily keeper checks

Confirm alert posture, clean eyes/nose, normal locomotion and grip, intact toes/tail, strong but not frantic basking response, water availability and correct heat/UV operation. Check that humid refuges are moist rather than wet. Record appetite, mass trend, shedding, feces and any aggression.

Breeding, Eggs and Evidence Notes

Oviparous high-altitude breeder with a short spring mating season; use published timing confidently, but treat egg incubation parameters conservatively.

Reproductive timing

Field studies show sperm availability and copulation concentrated in native spring, especially October-November. By December pregnant females are already present. In this Northern Hemisphere-shifted schedule that corresponds approximately to April-May mating and gravid females from June onward.

Eggs and nesting

The species is oviparous. Argentine National Parks sources report large dirty-white eggs over 20 mm long, apparently about three per clutch. Exact natural laying dates are not well resolved in the sources reviewed, so the July-August nesting window in this keeper schedule is a cautious translation rather than a fixed field deadline.

Nest provision

From early summer, provide a deep secluded lay area with a loose but cohesive mineral soil/sand mix beneath or beside a secure rock slab. Keep the lower layer lightly moist but never saturated. Offer more than one site with slightly different temperature/moisture so the female can choose.

Incubation caution

Do not assume tropical incubation temperatures. Natural nests experience a cool high-altitude climate and strong daily/seasonal fluctuations. If eggs are produced, record date, mass and dimensions, and use a conservative moderate-temperature incubation plan rather than high constant heat until more direct species-specific incubation data are available.

Evidence confidence

Taxonomy / range - High

SIB / Reptile Database; endemic Pampa de Achala-Champaqui.

Seasonal activity - High

Warm rainy Oct-Apr activity; cold dry May-Sep hibernation repeatedly documented.

Breeding timing - High-moderate

Sperm and mating peak in Oct-Nov; pregnant females by Dec.

Egg number - Moderate

National Parks account reports apparently about three large eggs.

Thermal biology - High-moderate

Direct thermoregulation work plus 2026 microhabitat study.

RH / spray targets - Moderate

Translated from park climate/RH and rainfall seasonality; not direct lizard micro-RH.

Incubation settings - Low

Precise temperature/moisture duration not located.

Key references

1. SIB / Parques Nacionales Argentina: distribution, saxicolous habitat, diet and egg observations. 2. Blengini et al. (2020), Copeia 108: seasonal sperm availability. 3. Naretto and colleagues (2021-2022): short reproductive season, activity Oct-Apr and hibernation May-Sep. 4. Parque Nacional Quebrada del Condorito management plan: rainfall, temperature and RH monitoring. 5. Pilustrelli, Di Tada and Martori (1987): thermoregulation. 6. Lopez Juri et al. (2026), Journal of Thermal Biology 135: high-altitude microhabitat thermal availability.

UVI beneath the optional T5 tube

Pristidactylus achalensis

Your measuring point

Measure UVI at normal back height directly beneath the brightest accessible part of the optional T5 strip. Place the strip toward the middle/back with free access to and away from it; preserve a gradient into fully covered refuges near UVI 0. These numbers describe the exposure area, not the whole enclosure or a daily average.

Measure and adjust

- 1. Use a UV Index meter.** A Solarmeter 6.5/6.5R or equivalent UVI meter is suitable. Broadband UVB readings in microwatts/cm2 cannot be substituted for UVI.
- 2. Measure the installed arrangement.** Warm the tube for about 30 minutes. Keep the reflector, guards and mesh in their normal positions. With the animal elsewhere, hold the sensor at its normal back height, aimed toward the tube.
- 3. Adjust the fixture.** Begin near the lower part of a newly selected working range and adjust gradually. Respect the lamp manufacturer's minimum distance. Recheck after each change and check every higher accessible branch, rock or platform.
- 4. Keep a full gradient.** Provide usable exposure across the animal's body, lower-UVI areas and fully covered refuges near UVI 0. For daytime baskers, overlap the UV area with visible light and appropriate basking warmth while retaining cooler shade.
- 5. Record and recheck.** Log UVI, measuring point, tube-to-back distance, tube age and lamp-on time. Recheck through the year and after changes to the tube, reflector, mesh or furnishings. Exposure duration and behaviour also determine dose.

A T5 range is a working exposure target, not a whole-cage setting, measured wild monthly average, guaranteed optimum or proven safety ceiling. The animal must be able to enter and leave freely.

Monthly target at normal back height

Month	UVI under T5 when on
January	Off
February	Off
March	1-2
April	2-3
May	3
June	3
July	3-4
August	3
September	2-3
October	1-2
November	Off / 1
December	Off

Retain numbers; clarify measurement

The retained range remains a provisional captive working target. No new species-specific result was found that clearly requires a numerical change. Retaining it is not certification of an experimentally established optimum.

Evidence level: Provisional retention. The seasonal schedule is a captive operating plan; it is not measured wild monthly UV. Off means the existing planned UVB-off/rest phase is preserved. Any staged Off/1 entry still means gradual reintroduction.

UV references: Baines et al. (2016), UV-Tool; Muryn, Baines and Dishman (2026), Reptile Lighting Guide V10. Full rationale and monthly comparison: [UVI_Audit_Report.html](#).