

Leopard Gecko Species

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By Jerry G. Walls

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There seems to be at least four species (and several subspecies by some accounts) sharing the same genus as the common leopard gecko (*Eublepharis macularius*). They all resemble the favorite pet herp to a rather strong degree and attain a similar adult size.

Taxonomists are still debating the validity of the new species and subspecies. Their differences often concern small body scales and placement of pattern stripes, spots, blotches and bands. Those kinds of details will not concern most keepers. It's not that we don't pay attention to variation - let's face it, breeders love breeding for variation - but we are used to seeing more variation in captive-bred stock than what exists between some of the described subspecies.

It's entirely possible, even likely, that our present amalgamation of leopard geckos in captivity is in fact a Heinz 57 hodgepodge of different races, subspecies and maybe even species. This could easily have happened due to the founder stock coming in from diverse locales that no exporter knew or cared about. It might explain why we've suddenly seen so much new variation showing up over the last few years.

The recognized species and subspecies described in the literature (see *The Lizards of Iran*, 1999, by Steven C. Anderson) may be quite valid, and their populations not so variable as we all have become conditioned to expect based on our experience with generations of captive-bred leopard geckos. In the wild, many of the races are now isolated from one another by mountain ranges, areas of increased aridity, etc. This might be a radical change from what may have existed as a continuous range for them historically.

Most, if not all, of our present-day leopard geckos came from Pakistan, and new waves are still arriving. A large influx of them in the mid-1990s was the source of the breeding stock that spawned many of the exciting new color morphs currently fueling the market.

The other three widely recognized *Eublepharis* species - *E. hardwicki*, *E. turcmenicus* and *E. angramainyu* - are virtually unknown in the pet trade. The fact that they hail from places like Iraq, Iran, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan may explain why few people are out collecting any and sending them to the United States.

Not long ago, large groups of leopards arriving from Pakistan were labeled as to their "distinct" races for the first time. At least some U.S. importers didn't notice any obvious differences and decided to house the leopards all together at their facilities. But some dealers did recognize the potential interest in the different races, and they kept them separate. So keep your eyes open for new names prefixing these imported "leopard" geckos.