

Mediterranean House Gecko

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Aah, nothing compares to the soothing, pulsing choirs of frogs, crickets and geckos of an evening! Geckos? Yes, some of those chirps, squeaks and clicks may come from Mediterranean house geckos that hunt along our fences and bricks as they entice mates and defend turf. Here's a sample of their songs: <https://californiaherps.com/lizards/pages/h.turcicus.sounds.html>

I haven't seen many of these geckos lately. We once spotted them pasted to our windowpanes



almost nightly, and we'd watch, bemusedly, as our cats played with their wriggling, detached tails. I wonder if our brown anoles (*Anolis sagrei*), of which I've noted an increasing abundance, are infringing on gecko hunting grounds.

Nonnative Mediterranean house gecko (*Hemidactylus turcius*)

I still see a few geckos. When investigating a blind snake under a log in Harlingen this summer, I startled a gecko, which darted, froze briefly, then zipped this way and that. I spotted one while I searched for nighttime orbweavers, and another that eyed tiny insects on a windowpane.

As its name suggests, the Mediterranean house gecko (*Hemidactylus turcius*), along with its possible rival, the brown anole (*Anolis sagrei*), is a nonnative, so, if my hunch is correct, one nonnative might be usurping another. But then, the snake I recently studied, the Brahminy blind snake (*Indotyphlops braminus*) is a nonnative, and, come to think of it, so am I—well, as of 42 years ago.

The verdict is not in on whether these introduced geckos or anoles, for that matter, do any damage—though it does appear that the brown anole, which hunts on or close to the ground, may be replacing the green one (*Anolis carolinensis*). But the latter may be holding its own, hunting amid higher foliage.

This gecko's family, Gekkonidae, for "true geckos", includes 58 genera and over 1,300 species worldwide, three of which are introduced species in Texas, though, the Mediterranean is the only one widely established here. Hailing from southern Europe, northern Africa and western Asia, it first appeared in Florida in 1915—likely via its (and/or its eggs') hitchhiking on plants, crops or lumber.

This gecko has since spread broadly, especially throughout much of the South; it doesn't abide cold temperatures for long—though it adeptly crawls under whatever it can to survive. Resistant to pesticides, it thrives in disjointed urban areas—hunting for insects, spiders and other invertebrates along fences, under bark and bricks, near lights and, especially in its native lands, within canyons and along and between rocks. Fond of human habitations, it appears unwilling, in most cases, to face the Texas wilds.

The Mediterranean gecko, which may grow to five inches long, has a distinct, flattened head, whitish underside and lidless eyes shielded from dust and debris by a transparent, moisturizing membrane; it also licks its eyes. Its pupils are oval like those of a cat. This gecko has granular, or bumpy, scales, with tubercles, or raised bumps—which may assist in camouflage, diffusion of light for thermoregulation or anchoring itself within cracks. Its spots are tan, pinkish or brown, with spots appearing more intense in daytime.

Mediterranean geckos lay several two-egg clutches of hard, sticky eggs, individually or communally, between walls, within cracks or under debris. Two-inch long hatchlings appear in about 50 days and reach sexual maturity within a year.

A gecko readily adheres to walls, fences and trunks by way of the setae—minute, hair-like structures—on the pads of its five toes, which contain bristle-like spatulae; these, like wee spatulas, stick to surfaces. This short video from *National Geographic* well illustrates this phenomenon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhfXbSSrabw>

The adhesiveness of gecko feet inspires scientists and engineers, who seek to create substances that can stick and detach from surfaces as adeptly. Geckos have prompted the creation of numerous useful items: climbing robots, adhesive pads to help soldiers climb and substances to seal wounds without staples or stitches. Interestingly, geckos cannot stick to everything—like some wet surfaces, or Teflon.

Since this introduced species is unregulated by Texas Parks and Wildlife, one holding a Texas hunting license can collect these geckos at any time. They are nonvenomous, easy to catch and have an extremely weak bite, which makes them popular pets. We do not know their effects on native species, so of course, this merits monitoring.