

The Exquisite Texas Banded Gecko

by Jim Seeden

It was after dark and a very light rain was falling. My dog and I were strolling about taking our usual evening walk when I noticed a movement at the side of the trail. I cast the light from my flashlight to the spot and thought I saw a scorpion. What I clearly saw, when it stopped, was a **Texas banded gecko**. It was so exquisite I could hardly believe my eyes; I stood entranced. I knelt down close to it and held the flashlight at close range in order to fully enjoy its delicate beauty.



Geckos are tiny reptiles and there are seven species in Texas. Of those, the most attractive is the Texas banded gecko. Of no more than about four inches in length, nearly half the length being tail, they are the smallest of the geckos.

While nocturnal and therefore infrequently seen,

they're fairly common in southern and eastern Texas, into extreme southeastern New Mexico and throughout northeastern Mexico.

I've learned why I first thought I saw a scorpion; the Texas banded gecko holds its tail up over its body when startled, just as a scorpion does. Perhaps for that reason some people erroneously believe that the geckos are venomous. They are in fact, entirely harmless.

The neck, body and slightly pudgy tail on young adults have alternating bands of yellow or cream and brownish-flesh or pink that sometimes may be divided by a black line. As they age, all of their bands will have dots or a filigree of black. The head may look brownish-gray and have some decorative yellow curlicues; the eyes have white rimmed eyelids and pupils that are dark vertical slits.

What fascinated me as much as anything about this exquisite gem were its tiny, delicate legs and feet. They were pinkish-flesh and the toes were incredibly thin, like tiny pink hairs but with barely discernible knuckles and nails. I pondered about how tiny its insect and spider prey must be for these appendages to suffice in

any struggle. Unlike other geckos, the toes have no pads for climbing smooth surfaces.

When threatened, male geckos may utter barely audible squeaks. As a means of escape, the tail breaks off easily but is soon regenerated, although the pattern of bands on the new tail may differ markedly from the original.

As with other reptiles, it periodically sheds its skin. It eats the shed skin which, while seeming a bit gross, is a means for conserving nutrients otherwise lost.

I shall always remember my brief encounter with this exquisite creature. It was a transcendent moment for me and I'm thankful for the opportunity to observe the richly diverse wildlife of our thorny brush country.