Name: _____ Date: _____

Why Does My Leopard Gecko Hide?

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 790 words

Priya keeps a log for her leopard gecko, Moss. On Monday at six o'clock she wrote, "Moss is hiding again." It was the third day in a row. She wondered whether something was wrong. Her aunt laughed gently. She explained that Moss was doing exactly what a leopard gecko should do. Leopard geckos are nocturnal, which means they are awake at night. In the wild they shelter under rocks or in burrows during the daylight.

Priya looked up where leopard geckos come from, and she learned that they live in dry, semi-desert places in the Middle East and northern India. That helped her understand the glass home on her shelf. Moss does not have just one hiding place, because a leopard gecko needs two. Priya read that one goes on the warm end and one on the cool end, so that Moss can choose where she feels comfortable.

When the sun goes down, Moss creeps out to eat. A leopard gecko feeds on insects. In the wild they hunt scorpions, centipedes, spiders and beetles. Priya's aunt gives Moss live insects, since one care sheet says that live ones that have just been fed are better than freeze-dried ones. Priya stays a little way back and watches. As Moss creeps closer she lifts her tail and wags it, like a tiny cat.

Priya noticed how thick Moss's tail is. She found out why. A leopard gecko's tail stores fat, which works as an energy reserve when food is hard to find. The tail can also come off, because a gecko may drop it to distract an animal that wants to eat it. That gives the gecko time to escape. A new tail starts to grow right away, but it comes back smooth, shorter and wider. That is why nobody should ever grab Moss by the tail.

Moss needs fresh, clean water every day, and Priya's job is to carry the dish to the sink, wash it and fill it. Her aunt takes care of the heat, because a leopard gecko's home needs a warm end. She does not use hot rocks, since they can get too warm and cause an injury. Priya never touches the heater or the lights. When anything in the glass home needs fixing, she tells her aunt.

Then comes the part Priya is most careful about. Reptiles often carry Salmonella germs in their digestive tracts, and a gecko can look perfectly healthy and still carry them. You do not even have to touch a reptile to get sick from the germs it carries. So Priya washes her hands with soap after she touches the dish, the food or anything in the home. Moss lives far from the kitchen. Her aunt cleans her things outside when she can. Nobody kisses Moss or holds her near their face.

Priya's little brother, Dev, is four. The CDC says that children younger than five should not handle or touch reptiles or their homes, so Dev watches from the sofa. Priya is older, but she

does not hold Moss very often either. A leopard gecko should not be handled regularly until she is at least six inches long, and a grown-up decides when anyone holds her. When her aunt does hold Moss, it is short and gentle, and everybody washes their hands afterwards.

Moss sheds her skin about every four to eight weeks. One evening Priya found a pale, crinkled shape in the corner, and then she saw Moss eating it. It looked odd to her, but leopard geckos do exactly that. Priya wrote the date in her log. She likes seeing the weeks go by, because the log shows her what is normal for Moss, and that makes it much easier to notice when something changes.

Hiding by day is normal, and Priya's log helps her spot what is not. A care sheet lists warning signs, such as eyes that are swollen, sunken or stuck shut, a gecko that refuses food, or one that has no energy. Priya does not try to work out what is wrong, because that is not her job. She tells her aunt right away, and her aunt calls a vet, since a vet knows what to do. Priya's job is to notice.

Last week, Priya read that pet leopard geckos can live ten to twenty years with good care. She did the sums and found that she might be thirty when Moss is old. That is a long time to keep washing a water dish. It is also why a grown-up decides about getting a pet like this, and why the water dish is the first job of the evening. Ask a grown-up to look at Peabody Pets with you. You will find it at pet.peabody.kids.

Questions

1. Why is Moss hiding during the day?

A. She is angry
B. Leopard geckos are awake at night
C. The home is too cold

2. Why does Priya's brother Dev stay on the sofa?

A. Children under five should not touch reptiles
B. He is afraid of insects
C. Moss only likes Priya

3. What happens after a gecko drops its tail?

A. Nothing grows back
B. A new tail starts to grow, but it looks different
C. The gecko cannot eat

4. What does Priya do when she sees a warning sign?

A. Waits to see what happens
B. Looks it up and tries a fix
C. Tells her aunt right away

5. In the book, what does "nocturnal" mean?

A. Awake at night
B. Living in water
C. Good at hiding food

Words to know

nocturnal: awake at night
desert: dry land
shed: drop old skin
Salmonella: a germ
vet: animal doctor

Answer key: Why Does My Leopard Gecko Hide?

1. B. Leopard geckos are awake at night
2. A. Children under five should not touch reptiles
3. B. A new tail starts to grow, but it looks different
4. C. Tells her aunt right away
5. A. Awake at night