Order Sauria / Family Helodermatidae

Heloderma suspectum
Cope, 1869

Common names:
- engl.: Gila monster
- esp.: -
- fr.: Gila monstrueux
- de.: Gilatier, Gila-Krustenechse
- ital.: Eloderma sospetto, Gila

Scientific synonyms: None

Characteristics:

Adult:
Snout bluntly rounded, lower lips bulge beyond the upper. Scales are bead-like tubercles, non-imbricate (do not overlap), horny coverings of osteoderms. Upper surface of head is covered with large convex scales, each in contact with 4-8 (most often 5) contiguous scales. Ventral scutes are squarish, arranged in transverse rows, and flattened in contrast to the tuberculate scales of the dorsum. Scale pits (as well as femoral or preanal pores) are lacking. Limbs are short and stout, approximately the same length, and with the same number of toes, front and rear. Digits are clawed (with slightly longer claws on front limbs), with transverse shields below. The tail is 41 to 55 percent of snout-to-vent length, fat, ending in a rounded, blunt tip.

- Body length: Maximum total length - 61 cm.
- Vertebrae: Maximum of 28 caudal.
- Dentition: Usually no palatine teeth present, rarely 1-2 palatines; 8-9 maxillary teeth.
- Scalation: Pair of enlarged preanal scales anterior to the vent. No more than 48-62 rows of subcaudal scales. Ventrally, scales above labials andlorlabials are widely separated by smooth skin. One pair of infralabials touching chin-shields.

- Colour: Pink, yellowish, and black. Most of upper surface of head mottled with pink.

Juvenile:
- Tail: 4-5 black bands on tail, including the tip.
Distribution: Mexico: Sonora as far south as Guaymas. USA: Arizona, south-western New Mexico, southern Nevada, and south-western Utah.


Trade: Main exporting state: United States of America. 4 specimens recorded by CITES Parties in 1979.

Intraspecific variation: *H.s. cinctum:* Dorsal pattern of four "saddles" or irregular, paired black bands (the two bands making up the pair separated by a row of pink or yellow circular areas). Tail with 5 distinct black bands (including black tip), which alternate with pink or yellowish bands, with the black bands sparsley if at all dotted with yellow and approximately the same width as intervening light areas. Found in western Nevada, south-eastern Nevada, and south-western Utah.

*H.s. suspectum:* Dorsal body with a black (or dark brown) net-like pattern enclosing pink or yellowish areas, the darker colour predominating. Tail with 4-5 irregular dark bands mottled or streaked with pink or yellow, alternating with pink or yellowish bands streaked or mottled with black or dark brown. Found in central and southern Arizona, south-western New Mexico and north and central Sonora province. Mexico.

Similar species: *H. horridum* (see sheet A-303.009.001.001): Upper surface of head black. No enlarged preanal scales anterior to vent. Tail tapering to blunt point, and with more than 75 rows of subcaudal scales, and usually 40 tail vertebrae.