

Wall Gecko: Translating African Domestic Ecology into Piano Narrative

Albert O. U. Authority, PhD

Department of Music, BLIS
Bilkent University, Bilkent, Ankara, Turkey

albert.authority@blisankara.org

ORCID ID: [0009-0002-9433-3801](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9433-3801)

Web of Science Researcher ID: OOM-9035-2025

Abstract

Wall Gecko is a short Grade 1 piano character piece inspired by a familiar ecological presence in many African households. Wall geckos, often seen clinging silently to walls and ceilings, play an important role in domestic ecosystems by hunting mosquitoes, spiders, and other small insects. This composition translates that everyday ecological interaction into a musical narrative through simple melodic gestures, dynamic contrasts, and subtle tempo modifications. Written in A minor and marked Allegretto, the piece employs accessible technical materials suitable for beginner pianists while offering expressive opportunities that support early musical imagination. The article presents a contextual background, a structural overview, and a detailed interpretive analysis of the work, highlighting its pedagogical value and its contribution to contemporary African piano literature. It argues that ecological imagery can enrich beginner repertoire and foster culturally grounded creative engagement.

Keywords: African Ecomusicology, Character Piece Composition, Contemporary African Piano Literature, Domestic Predator–Prey Imagery, Piano Pedagogy, Wall Gecko



Introduction

Character pieces have long served as an effective pedagogical and expressive medium in piano literature, enabling young performers to engage imaginatively with extra-musical ideas while developing foundational technical skills (Gordon 2012). *Wall Gecko* continues this tradition within an African ecological context. The wall gecko is a familiar presence in many homes across West and Central Africa, where it quietly regulates insect populations and forms part of the domestic environment (Akani et al. 2013). This composition draws on that everyday ecological relationship to create a vivid musical narrative accessible to Grade 1 learners.

The aim of this article is to present a structured analysis of *Wall Gecko*, situating it within ecological musicology and beginner-level piano pedagogy. The discussion proceeds through cultural and ecological background, compositional overview, bar-by-bar interpretive analysis, pedagogical significance, and creative contribution.

Cultural and Ecological Background

Wall geckos (*Hemidactylus frenatus* and related species) are common synanthropic reptiles that thrive in human dwellings across tropical regions. Their presence in African homes is both ecological and cultural. Ecologically, they serve as natural pest controllers, feeding on mosquitoes, spiders, moths, and other insects (Ineich 2010). Culturally, they are widely recognised, often tolerated, and sometimes associated with domestic symbolism or folklore (Nonga and Haruna 2015).

Recent scholarship in ecological musicology emphasises the value of integrating everyday environmental experiences into musical creativity, particularly within non-Western contexts where ecological relationships are embedded in domestic life (Allen 2011). *Wall Gecko* aligns with this perspective by transforming



a familiar household scene into a musical narrative that is accessible to young learners and resonant within African cultural experience.

Compositional Overview

Wall Gecko is written in A minor and marked Allegretto at crotchet equals 96. The piece comprises twenty-four bars organised into six four-bar phrases, each depicting a distinct moment in the gecko's hunting sequence. The musical language is intentionally simple, employing stepwise motion, short motifs, and clear dynamic contrasts appropriate for Grade 1 pianists. Expressive devices such as crescendo, diminuendo, poco accelerando, and ritardando are introduced in subtle ways that encourage early interpretive awareness. The narrative structure mirrors the ecological behaviour of the gecko, moving from stillness to alertness, pursuit, attack, and eventual calm.

Interpretive Analysis

Bars 1 to 4: Waiting on the Wall (*mp, Allegretto*)

The piece opens at mezzo-piano with a steady Allegretto pulse, evoking the quiet stillness of a gecko resting on a wall at dusk. Although the creature appears motionless, it remains alert. The moderate dynamic and stable tempo create an atmosphere of controlled readiness. This aligns with ecological observations that geckos often remain stationary for extended periods while monitoring insect movement (Ineich 2010).

Bars 5 to 8: Mosquitoes Appear (*p, poco cresc.*)

The dynamic softens to piano, and the quaver patterns imitate the delicate buzzing of mosquitoes entering the space. The performer may introduce a slight sense of forward motion, reflecting increased insect activity. The gentle crescendo suggests the gecko's growing awareness as it begins to track its prey. The musical



imagery corresponds with studies noting the erratic yet continuous movement of mosquitoes in domestic environments (Service 2012).

Bars 9 to 12: Spider Crawls Nearby (*mf, slightly calmer*)

At mezzo-forte, a spider enters the musical scene. The performer may adopt a more deliberate touch to portray the spider's careful crawling. The stronger dynamic reflects heightened ecological activity on the wall. This section introduces contrast between the rapid mosquito gestures and the slower, more grounded spider movement, reinforcing the multi-species environment typical of African households (Akani et al. 2013).

Bars 13 to 16: The Gecko Spots Its Prey (crescendo from *mp* to *f*, *poco accelerando*)

Rising melodic figures and increasing dynamics portray the gecko's intensified focus. A slight *poco accelerando* builds anticipation as the predator locks onto its target. The crescendo from mezzo-piano to forte mirrors the gecko's heightened concentration and physiological readiness to strike, consistent with behavioural studies of gecko predation (Ineich 2010).

Bars 17 to 20: Pounce (*f, a tempo with energy*)

The musical climax occurs at forte. The gecko launches a rapid attack, and the strong dynamic captures the speed and certainty of the hunt. Returning to the original tempo ensures clarity and control while conveying sudden movement. This section represents the successful capture of a mosquito, a common prey item in domestic gecko diets (Nonga and Haruna 2015).

Bars 21 to 24: Meal Finished (*dim. to p, poco ritardando*)

The music gradually softens through a diminuendo to piano, accompanied by a gentle *ritardando*. This portrays the gecko settling after feeding and returning to

stillness. The final notes suggest calm satisfaction and readiness for future hunting opportunities.

Pedagogical Significance

The piece offers several pedagogical benefits for beginner pianists. First, it introduces dynamic control through clear contrasts between piano, mezzo-piano, mezzo-forte, and forte. Second, it encourages tempo stability while allowing for expressive modifications such as *poco accelerando* and *ritardando*, which are essential skills in early musical development (Hallam 2010). Third, the narrative structure supports imaginative engagement, enabling learners to connect musical gestures with ecological imagery. Character pieces of this nature have been shown to enhance motivation and interpretive confidence in young performers (McPherson and Gabrielsson 2002).

Creative and Expressive Contribution

Wall Gecko contributes to contemporary African piano literature by drawing on domestic ecological imagery rather than external or imported narratives. It demonstrates how everyday African environments can inspire expressive musical storytelling, even at beginner levels. The piece also aligns with broader movements in decolonial creative practice, which advocate for culturally grounded artistic expression and the inclusion of indigenous ecological knowledge in creative work (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). By integrating ecological behaviour into musical form, the composition enriches the repertoire available to young pianists and supports culturally relevant pedagogy.

Conclusion

This article has presented a structured analysis of *Wall Gecko*, highlighting its ecological inspiration, compositional design, interpretive possibilities, and pedagogical value. Through simple musical materials, the piece offers a vivid



depiction of the predator-prey relationship between wall geckos and insects in African homes. Its narrative structure, dynamic contrasts, and expressive nuances make it a meaningful addition to beginner piano literature and a culturally grounded contribution to contemporary African composition.

References

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Appendix: Full Score of Wall Gecko

Wall Gecko

Composed by
Authority, O. U. ALbert

Allegretto (♩ = 96)

Piano

p

Moderato
(Slow and careful)

Pno.

mf

cresc.....

Pno.

p *f*

dim.

Pno.

p

