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Blue-Tongued Skink Care

Natural History

The blue-tongued skinks are a group of aptly named diurnal (active during day), omnivorous (eating both plant and animal matter), and long-lived lizard that inhabits a wide range of habitats in Australia, New Guinea, and the island of Tasmania. These beautifully distinctive lizards are known for their excellent personalities, hardiness, and uniqueness. Most blue-tongues in the pet trade are a result of captive breeding, which makes them a little more expensive than most imported lizards. However, the captive breeding generally ensures that the skink is healthy and does not have a high parasite burden.

The wild blue-tongued family occupies a varied ecological niche and specific microhabitat. For the sake of individuality, each species will be listed separately for better understanding of how to adapt the captive indoor caging. These skinks live an average of 10-20 years and can reach 20 inches in length (including tail).

Tropical Skinks

Teliqua gigas – Indonesian blue-tongued - Found in Indonesia and New Guinea. Disposition is not as pleasant as most other B-T's.

Teliqua scincoides - Irian Jaya banded blue-tongued. Dry tropical areas of Southern New Guinea.

Teliqua scincoides intermedia – Northern blue-tongued. Tropical Northern Australia. Produces 5-20 live born babies.

Temperate to Dry Skinks

Teliqua mustifaciata – Centralian blue-tongued. Smaller skink that can range north into more tropical areas or central into more temperate dry microhabitats.

Teliqua occipitalis – Western blue-tongued. Prefers dry habitats. Likes berries and spiders. Produces 5-10 live young.

Teliqua scincoides – Common/Eastern blue-tongued. Likes semidesert/agricultural areas. Averages 12 live young.

Captive Housing—substrate, lighting, and temperature

These wonderful lizards should be housed individually as social groupings do not occur in the wild. An adult of any species should have a minimum of 2 x 2 foot enclosure. Vertical space is not as important as horizontal space for these ground dwellers. Cypress mulch works well for tropical species (to enable humidity to be stable) and aspen (serves to maintain a dry environment) for the desert species. Enough substrate should be put in the enclosure as to allow burrowing.

A basking area for both heat and full-spectrum ultraviolet lighting should be provided at one end of the enclosure. The heated spot should have a flat slate rock to shine the light on. The most efficient light source is the Exo Terra Solar Glo. It is a mercury vapor bulb that emits heat, UVB, and UVA. UV light has multiple benefits, including calcium metabolism and improved appetite and activity. Proper calcium metabolism helps protect against metabolic bone disease. Be sure to follow manufacturer's directions when installing this bulb. Use a clamp lamp with a ceramic fixture to prevent melting. The fixture should be carefully secured to avoid being bumped and breaking the filament or starting a fire. Make sure to replace the bulb yearly and remember that glass and plastic blocks UV light. If needed, a red bulb can be added for nighttime temperature drops (night temperatures should not be below 70 degrees Fahrenheit).

Always use a thermometer to measure cage temperature. A hygrometer (to measure humidity) should be used as well for the more tropical species. The basking spot should reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit. The rest of the cage should range down into the low 80's. If the tank does not get below 85 degrees on the cool side, a larger cage is in order. The best type of lighting for blue-tongues is the sun. These lizards should receive about 5-10 hours per week in the sun. The sunbathing should be only in temperatures at or below the maximum of the basking spot. Never sunbathe the lizard in any sort of aquarium, as ultraviolet light is converted to heat as it goes through it and will overheat the lizard. Baby pools in shade work very well.

Feeding

Feeding the blue-tongues properly is not difficult due to the fact that it is an omnivore (eats both plant and animal material). It is recommended to feed babies at least every other day (if not daily). Adults should be fed not more than every third day. Green leafy vegetables should be the bulk of the vegetable diet. Grated carrots and few mixed vegetables can be added for variety. A pure calcium supplement such as Rep-Cal (without Vitamin D) or crushed Tums should be added to the greens of young lizards two to three times per week. Adults can be supplemented once weekly (true only if adequate UV light or exposure to the sun is achieved). Once weekly, feed an appropriately sized rodent or reasonable numbers of crickets, mealworms (very few as they are fatty), wax worms, or wild caught insects. The more animal based protein fed, the faster your lizard will grow. However, fast growth is not healthy growth as the liver and kidneys can be overworked. Fast growth typically means a shorter lifespan as a result. Supplementing diet with oral vitamin D is known to be toxic to diurnal (day basking) lizards. Do not supplement with vitamin D! Provide fresh water daily. Use a bowl that is large enough for the lizard to crawl into for bathing.

Diseases that occur in Captivity

Metabolic Bone Disease

Parasites – wild caught or captive

Cage trauma – another lizard or fallen object

Thermal burns

Obesity