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Solomon Island Prehensile-Tailed Skink Care

Over the last decade, the Solomon Island Skink has been imported into the United States in great numbers. This skink's habitat is undergoing serious deforestation in the South Pacific Islands. The availability in the US market is good but will be dwindling as these lizards are now threatened in the wild. Over half the skinks imported are dead on arrival or seriously ill. Thus, veterinary care and captive breeding are necessary for keeping these skinks from being endangered or extinct.

Natural History

The Solomon Island Prehensile-tailed Skink, monkey tailed skinks, or Solomon Island skink all refer to the same lizard (*Corucia zebrata*). This is a tree-dwelling (arboreal), crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk), vegetable-eating (herbivore) skink that lives in the tropical rainforest. These lovely lizards come in several colors (olive, green, beige, brown, or yellow) and patterns (speckled, spotted, solid, or banded). Males have larger, square heads and more slender bodies than females. However, a trained professional should sex *Corucias* if it is not evident. Males have hemipenes that can be everted at the base of the tail. The skink's tail is prehensile, which allows them to wrap branches and eat low hanging tree foliage.

Caging

Custom built caging is recommended. The larger the better. 4 feet length by 2 feet width by 4 feet high is the minimum size for a pair of skinks. If kept alone, one can modify a 55-gallon tank. The enclosure should have backing spots, plenty of cage branches, and elevated hiding places. The most dominant skink will usually occupy the highest branch.

Lighting

Full spectrum ultra violet lighting (such as lumichrome, chromalux, Vita-Lite, or Durotest) works well. An incandescent bulb or a chromalux bulb can be used to provide heat as well.

Temperature

Solomon Island Skinks are most active at dawn and dusk (crepuscular). Daytime temperature should be maintained between 80-90 degrees Fahrenheit. Basking spots can be up to 95 degrees. Temperature gradients are important and allow the animal to choose the temperature they prefer. Having a large cage with basking spots can establish temperature gradients. Lights or infrared heat emitters should be either kept outside the cage or screened off from the lizards. If the basking light is outside the cage, the aluminum clamp lights work well as fixtures.

Feeding and Watering

Water should be offered free choice and changed daily. The bowl should be large and heavy to avoid being tipped. Feeding prehensile tailed skinks is similar to feeding other herbivorous lizards. Green leafy (not lettuce) vegetables should comprise the majority of the diet (50-60%). Collard, mustard, turnip, and dandelion greens are excellent choices. Frozen mixed vegetables and sliced sweet potatoes should comprise 30-40% of the diet. Fruit and monkey biscuits should comprise less than 5% of the diet.

For the newly acquired finicky skink, vegetable baby foods can be given. Pothos (a common house plant) clippings are also readily accepted. A calcium supplement is also necessary in skinks. Cherry flavored Tums tablets (crushed) should be sprinkled on the food twice weekly in adults and 3-4 times in newborns.

All the food and supplements should be chopped in fine pieces and mixed thoroughly to prevent finicky eaters from choosing only specific food items. Long-term finicky eaters will develop nutritional deficiencies if fed improperly.

Veterinary Care

A post-purchase exam should be done in order to assure the health of your pet. Deworming should be done routinely and repeated annually.

Summary

If Solomon Island Prehensile tailed skinks are kept properly they can live for up to 8 to 10 years. Captive breeding of these lizards will be extremely important from keeping this animal from extinction as much of the tropical rainforest in these islands is being cut for lumber. Try to maintain these animals in pairs for captive breeding for the long-term preservation of the species.