

Blue Tongued Skink Care (*Tiliqua spp.*)



Common Species

Pygmy blue tongue skink (*T. adelaidensis*)

Indonesian blue tongue skink (*T. gigas gigas*)- gray or gray brown with irregular narrow bands of dark brown across the back

Central blue tongue skink (*T. multifasciata*)

Blotched blue tongue skink (*T. nigrolutea*)- black with yellowish, irregularly spotted and striped pattern

Western blue tongue skink (*T. occipitalis*)- compact with short tail ; reddish brown with light crossbanding

Shingleback blue tongue skink (*T. rugosa*)

Eastern blue tongue skink (*T. scincoides scinoides*)

Northern blue tongue skink (*T. scincoides intermedia*)

Tanimbar blue tongue skink (*T. scincoides chimaerea*)



Natural History

Most often found in Australia , Tasmania , Papua New Guinea , Indonesia . They are terrestrial and depending on subspecies they may be found in open woodlands, margins of forests and fields or semi-deserts.

Special Characteristics

They are a stocky reptile with small legs and delicate toes. They have broad, blunt triangular heads with a blue tongue. They are ovoviviparous, which means they produce live young.

Longevity

Up to 30 years in captivity

Size

12-24 inches; 280-510 grams

Behavior

Diurnal, in the wild they spend their day foraging and basking. They are docile and are easy to handle in captivity. If threatened they will puff up and hiss loudly.

Handling

Wash your hands before and after handling. Be sure to support their long body when picking them up so they don't get nervous. Do not pick them up by their tail as they can drop their tail, though it can regrow.



Captive Cage Requirements

Lighting

Ultraviolet B is required to maintain healthy skinks. The best source of UVB is the sun, but this is difficult to provide in captivity since glass filters out UVB light. Instead, a special fluorescent light bulb can be purchased from a reptile shop. This bulb must be placed no more than 12 inches from the basking site (with no glass or plastic between), and should be on a timer to provide about 14 hours of daylight and 10 hours of darkness. It must be replaced every 6-12 months, because even though the visible light is emitted, the UVB fades. Light bulbs with a screw-in attachment end (even those sold as "full spectrum" bulbs) provide heat, but not UVB.

Temperature

The daytime temperature of the tank should be between 75-85° F with a basking spot of 90-105° F. A heat lamp should be placed over one end of the tank, providing a temperature gradient with one side of the tank warmer than the other. Select the wattage of the bulb to provide the proper temperature within the tank. Under tank heaters are useful to gently raise the overall temperature of the tank, but should be used with a thermostat or rheostat to accommodate changing ambient temperatures. Also be cautious as skinks like to burrow and so there is increased risk of thermal burns if there is no barrier between the glass and heating pad. At night the temperature should drop to 70-75° F. When room temperatures are below 68° F at night, use an under tank heater or a red (infrared) bulb. Obviously, at least two thermometers must be in use to monitor these temperatures, and care must be taken to prevent burns to the lizard. Heating elements can be dangerous if not used properly, and a smoke alarm is recommended.



Humidity

Good ventilation is essential, and a hide box with slightly damp substrate (sphagnum moss, loosely piled damp towel) is good for promoting healthy skin shedding. Low humidity will cause improper shedding (dysecdysis), which can cause toe damage. Humidity should be maintained at 40-60%. Aim for higher end of spectrum when shedding.

Water

Provide a water dish that is large enough for the whole skink to soak its body. Lizards often defecate in their water, so it must be replaced daily and the dish disinfected at least once a week.

Enclosure

Adults require at least a 40-55 gal tank, but the longer and wider the better. Substrate can be reptile carpet or towels but they like to burrow so soft woods such as aspen (no pine or cedar) bedding, cypress mulch or recycled newspaper products (Yesterdays Newstm or Carefresh tm) can be used. Be sure that it is not an abrasive substrate for burrowing as it can cause irritation to the skin. They enjoy exploration, so provide enrichment by offering low branches and logs for them to climb. They also prefer snug hiding areas so be sure to include a half-log or rock cave.

They can be placed outdoors in warmer weather as long as they have access to sunlight, shade and dry areas. They can and will dig so the enclosure should include a fence 50cm below ground.

Feeding

Blue tongue skinks are omnivorous. Their diet should consist of 60% plant material and 40% animal matter. Examples of plant matter include mixed vegetables (i.e. beans, squash, carrots, parsnips), thinly sliced greens (i.e. collards, dandelion, escarole). Berries and fruits (blueberries, cherries, peaches, nectarines, strawberries, pears, banana) should also be provided.

Hatchlings can be started on mealworms, small crickets and pinkie mice. As they grow increase the size of the prey to earth worms, fuzzies and snails. Juveniles are generally fed daily to every other day and adults can be fed once to twice weekly.

Supplements

Food should be dusted with a calcium supplement, without phosphorus. A multi-vitamin should be used monthly. Calcium and multivitamin supplements are key to a healthy reptile – please provide a calcium supplement with no phosphorous or D3 3 times weekly, a multivitamin weekly, and a calcium +D3 supplement every 2 weeks.

See our 'Reptile Supplements handout for more information

Common illnesses

Parasites, dysecdysis (especially toes), respiratory infections, thiamin deficiency (frozen diet), Metabolic Bone Disease

Sources

Kaplan, Melissa. Herp care Collection, Blue Tongue Skinks. 2009.

Exotics DVM, Vol 8 Issue 6. 2007.

Chicago Exotics Animal Hospital: Deanne Strat, DVM Susan Horton, DVM

DIET EXAMPLES

Proteins:

- Canned super premium dog/cat food
- Dry super premium dog/cat food (moistened)
- Canned insect products (any variety, but snails are a favorite)
- Mealworms and superworms
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Boiled chicken
- Ground turkey (cooked)
- Lean ground beef (cooked)
- Pinky mice (live or frozen/thawed, but only occasionally)

Fruits and Veggies:

- Collard greens
- Turnip greens
- Mustard greens
- Squash (including spaghetti, scallop, butternut, acorn, Hubbard, etc.)
- Peas
- Brussel sprouts
- Carrots
- Dandelions (pesticide free)
- Hibiscus flowers (pesticide free)
- Mango
- Raspberries
- Figs
- Papaya
- Cantaloupe
- Strawberries
- Blueberries

If feeding canned dog/cat foods to your blue-tongued skink, be sure to feed only super premium foods that contain no by-products and no meat/bone meal. Many foods are available with fruits and vegetables included; they are not a substitute for fresh foods, but they are preferred over 100-percent-protein cat/dog foods.