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IGUANAS

Blue Spiny Lizard

Sceloporus cyanogenys

Sceloporus cyanogenys is a stocky, rough-scaled lizard from rocky country in southern Texas and eastern Mexico. The male has a blue throat, blue sides and a black collar. The species is diurnal, feeds on insects and needs a roomy, dry enclosure with rocks, UVB and a hot basking spot. It gives birth to live young and is shy and fast.

Family: Phrynosomatidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**25-36 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-7 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**100 × 50 × 50 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**27-31 °C**
Basking spot	**38-42 °C**
Temperature, night	**21-26 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly, in pairs or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Sexually mature	**28-36 months**
Litter size	**5-20 young**
Clutches per year	**1**
Gestation	**90-120 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Not Evaluated (NE)**

About the species

Sceloporus cyanogenys is a large, slightly flattened and sturdily built lizard. The scales on the back and tail are stiff, pointed and keeled, so that the animal feels rough and thorny. The male is blue-grey on the back and strongly blue along the sides and has a black collar with pale edges and a clear blue patch on each shoulder, as well as blue belly patches, a blue throat and a banded tail. The colours are strongest in the breeding season. The female and the juveniles are grey or brown and lack most of the blue.

Adults grow to 36 cm including the tail, and the tail makes up just over half. The body measures up to just under 15 cm from snout to vent in the largest males, while females average about 11 cm. This makes the species the largest of the genus in the USA. Newborn juveniles are about 3 cm from snout to vent.

The species name means "blue jaw", from Latin cyaneus, deep blue, and Greek genys, jaw, and refers to the male's blue throat. The species was described in 1885 by Edward Drinker Cope and was long a subspecies of *Sceloporus serrifer*. The animals along Mexico's Gulf coast south to Petén in Guatemala, formerly called *S. serrifer plioporus*, are today included in *S. cyanogenys*. Where the two species meet, they grade into one another.

S. cyanogenys is an animal to look at, not a pet for handling. It is fast and shy and defends itself by biting and fleeing. The species has hardly been bred in captivity, and the animals in the trade are usually wild-caught.

Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

Distribution and habitat

Sceloporus cyanogenys lives in southern Texas in the USA, from the area around the Devils River and Starr County, and in eastern Mexico in Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas. The type locality is Monterrey in Nuevo León. If the animals along the Gulf coast are included, the range continues south through Veracruz and Tabasco to Petén in northern Guatemala.

> **Native range:** United States, Mexico and Guatemala.

HABITAT

Sceloporus cyanogenys is tied to rocky country: boulders, rocky slopes, rock piles and outcrops in dry scrub and thorn scrub. It is also found on abandoned buildings, bridge foundations and masonry, which offer the same crevices and basking spots. It stays on and between the stones and climbs little. It is diurnal and waits for prey from a lookout post, from which it snaps up insects that pass by.

The climate is hot and semi-arid with long, hot summers and mild winters. Females give birth to live young once a year.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 100 × 50 × 50 cm (length × width × height). Larger is better, because the species is fast and active and uses the whole floor area; in the wild the territory is at least as large as a bedroom. A pair or a male with two females needs an equally large or larger enclosure. The lid must close tightly and have good ventilation, because the species jumps well and is out in a flash when the lid is opened.

The substrate is coarse sand mixed with small stones at a depth of 5-10 cm. Build a rocky landscape of flat stones, slate and cork in stable stacks that cannot shift, with crevices of different widths that the animal can retreat into. Horizontal and sloping stones provide basking spots at several heights. The stones must stand directly on the bottom so that the animal cannot dig in under them.

The enclosure should stand in a quiet place, because the animal is shy. Remove droppings regularly, and replace the substrate when it is soiled.

TEMPERATURE

The enclosure should have a clear gradient. The air should be 27-31 °C during the day, and the basking spot should be 38-42 °C on the surface, measured with an infrared thermometer. Use a halogen spot over a flat stone; the stone heats up, and the animal lies flat against it to warm up quickly. The animal must always be able to withdraw from the heat. Too cold produces sluggish animals that do not thrive, and too warm everywhere makes them hide.

At night the heat lamp is switched off, and the temperature may fall to 21-26 °C. A slightly cooler period with shorter days in winter suits the climate, but true brumation is not necessary.

Read more: Heat and temperature Read more: Brumation and the seasons

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The air should be dry to moderately humid: 30-50 %. The species does poorly in humid, stagnant air, so ventilation should be good. Provide a low, stable bowl of fresh water, and change the water daily. Spilled water must be removed, and a wet substrate replaced.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Sceloporus cyanogenys is diurnal and basks in full sun, so it needs strong light and UVB. Use a T5 HO tube (Ferguson zone 3) in a reflector over the basking spot, and keep the distance within the manufacturer's recommendation. UVB does not pass through glass or plastic. Replace the tubes according to the manufacturer's instructions.

The light should be on for at least 12 hours a day, preferably following the season with the longest day in summer, and switched off completely at night. A bright, warm enclosure gets the animal to eat, mark territory and breed.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Sceloporus cyanogenys eats insects. Give a varied diet of live insects: crickets, small cockroaches, mealworms, morio worms, silkworms and waxworms (the last sparingly). The insects should be small in relation to the animal's head and preferably soft. Gut-load the feeder insects with a nutritious diet for the final day before they are fed to the lizard.

Juveniles are fed daily, adults 3-4 times a week with as much as they can eat. Dust the food with calcium with D3 every 10-14 days for adults and once a week for growing juveniles, even if the UVB light is in order. If the animal becomes fat, cut down.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The animal is fast and shy and defends itself by biting and fleeing. It is an animal to look at, not to handle. If it has to be picked up, hold the body from neck to vent. Never take hold of the tail: it can break off and regrows only partially.

Males are territorial and fight, so they must be housed separately. The male displays his blue throat and belly with push-ups. One male can be kept with one or two females in a roomy enclosure with many visual barriers. New animals need peace for the first few weeks.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The sexes can be told apart by colour: the male has a blue throat and blue belly patches, the female is grey or brown. The male also has a thicker tail base and larger femoral pores. The animals become sexually mature in their third summer, at 28-36 months.

MATING

Breeding activity begins in spring, when the days grow longer. The male displays his blue throat and belly and marks his area. Put the female with the male under supervision, and separate them if he bites her too hard. Captive breeding has scarcely been described.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species is viviparous and has one litter a year. The female gives birth to 5-20 young, on average about 13, and large females have the most. Give the gravid female plenty of food and calcium, a warm basking spot and peace. Contact a vet if she strains without result or stops eating.

INCUBATION

There are no eggs to incubate. The length of gestation is not documented; 90-120 days is an estimate. The female needs the same temperatures and the same basking spot as usual. Keep her alone in the enclosure as the birth approaches.

REARING THE YOUNG

The juveniles are about 3 cm from snout to vent and fend for themselves from birth. Separate them from the adults, and give them a small enclosure with the same temperatures, rocks, basking spot and UVB as the adults. Feed them daily with small insects, and dust with calcium with D3 once a week. Keep them singly or in small groups of the same size, and separate the males when they develop colour.

Health and common mistakes

Sceloporus cyanogenys is usually wild-caught, so new animals should be quarantined for at least three months and have their droppings examined for parasites. Typical problems are:

- Mites and intestinal parasites in wild-caught animals.
- Metabolic bone disease from too little UVB and calcium.
- Dehydration and shedding problems from too little drinking water.
- Burns from heat lamps that are positioned too low or lack a guard.
- Stress and emaciation in newly caught animals that refuse food. Peace and many hiding places help.
- Loss of the tail if the animal is held by the tail.

A healthy animal is quick, has clear eyes, a plump tail and no mites in the scale folds. Animals in captivity have reached just under 7 years. An animal that loses weight, does not eat or breathes with its mouth open must see a vet with reptile experience.

Read more: Common diseases and signs of illness

Always ask someone who knows

This guide is a good place to start, but it cannot replace experience. Animals differ, and much of what matters most is learned from people who have kept the species for years. Talk to a breeder, an experienced keeper or a vet who knows reptiles and amphibians before you get the animal - and again if anything looks wrong.