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IGUANAS

Yarrow's Spiny Lizard

Sceloporus jarrovii

Sceloporus jarrovii is a sturdy, rough-scaled lizard from mountain forests and rocky terrain in the south-western USA and northern Mexico. The male has a blue throat and blue belly, and both sexes have a black collar with a white edge. The species is diurnal, feeds on insects and requires a dry, well-ventilated enclosure with rocks, UVB, a hot basking spot and a cool winter rest. It gives birth to live young.

Family: Phrynosomatidae Former name: *Sceloporus jarrovi*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**15-25 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**4-7 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Montane forest and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**90 × 45 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**26-28 °C**
Basking spot	**35-40 °C**
Temperature, night	**16-20 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**8-12 °C** 8-12 weeks
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly, in pairs or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Litter size	**2-14 young**
Clutches per year	**1**
Gestation	**180-240 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

About the species

Sceloporus jarrovii is a compact, sturdily built lizard with stiff, keeled scales, so the animal feels rough and spiny. The back is grey to brownish green with a cross-banded pattern and tones of copper, green and pink, and the crown is dark grey. The most reliable distinguishing feature is a complete black collar with a white lower edge. The male also has a blue throat and blue belly patches, which are strongest in the breeding season. The female is more subdued and has less blue.

Adults reach 15-25 cm in length including the tail. Measured from snout to vent, adults exceed 75 mm and the largest reach 105 mm. The animal changes colour with temperature: it is darkest when cold and beginning to bask, and palest when warm and active. Lifespan is not documented; 4-7 years corresponds to the closely related *Sceloporus* species.

The species name honours Henry Crécy Yarrow, an American army surgeon and volunteer curator of amphibians and reptiles at the Smithsonian museum in Washington. The species was described in 1875 by Edward Drinker Cope. Two subspecies are recognised, of which *Sceloporus jarrovii lineolateralis* from Durango and Zacatecas differs in having light and dark lines along the side; the two forms grade into each other and cannot always be told apart.

S. jarrovii is an animal to watch, not a pet for handling. It is fast, alert and territorial. The species is rarely kept, and animals in the trade are often wild-caught.

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

Distribution and habitat

Sceloporus jarrovii lives in south-eastern Arizona and south-western New Mexico in the USA and southwards through north-western Mexico: eastern Sonora, western Chihuahua, Durango, western Zacatecas and northern Nayarit. There are also records from Tamaulipas in north-eastern Mexico. The type locality lies in southern Arizona between Fort Grant and Fort Bowie. *S. j. lineolateralis* is found only in Durango and Zacatecas. In Arizona the species has been introduced to the Santa Catalina Mountains north of Tucson; the map shows only the native range.

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

HABITAT

Sceloporus jarrovii lives in the mountains from about 1,300 m to over 3,000 m: in evergreen oak and pine forest and, higher up, in coniferous forest. In Arizona it is found in the isolated mountain ranges known as sky islands, where cool forest rises above the desert. It lives in rocky canyons, on cliff faces, in boulder fields and on scree slopes, and favours large cliff faces and large boulders, where it basks from a lookout post. Both males and females defend a territory, and the males display with push-ups and the blue throat.

The climate at altitude is cool with cold nights and a cold winter. In winter the animals gather in communal shelters in crevices on south-facing cliff faces, and they emerge only on unusually warm, sunny days. The species mates in autumn, and the females give birth to live young in early summer, once a year.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

There is only limited detailed knowledge about the care of *Sceloporus jarrovii*, and the recommendations here are based on the species' mountain climate and on close relatives. The figures are borrowed from *Sceloporus undulatus*, *Sceloporus occidentalis* and *Sceloporus magister*, which have the same basic requirements for sun, dryness and a cool winter.

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 90 × 45 × 45 cm (length × width × height). Larger is better, because the species is active and uses the whole floor area. A pair or a male with one or two females needs at least 120 × 50 × 50 cm. The lid must close tightly, because the animal is fast and a good jumper.

The substrate is coarse sand mixed with unfertilised garden soil to a depth of 5-10 cm. Build a rock landscape of flat stones, slate and cork in stable stacks that cannot shift, with crevices the animal can retreat into, and sloping branches and pieces of bark for climbing. The stones must stand directly on the bottom, so that the animal cannot dig in under them. The enclosure should stand in a quiet spot, and the air should not be stagnant.

TEMPERATURE

The enclosure needs a clear gradient. The air should be 26-28 °C by day, and the basking spot should be 35-40 °C at the surface, measured with an infrared thermometer. The species prefers a body temperature of about 34 °C, and at 39 °C it loses control of its body, so the basking spot must not be hotter. 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 retreat from the heat. Too cold gives sluggish animals, and too hot everywhere makes them hide.

At night the heat lamp is switched off, and the temperature falls to 16-20 °C, which matches the cool nights in the mountains. In winter the animal needs a cool rest period at 8-12 °C for 8-12 weeks, in darkness and without food. The animal must be healthy and in good condition before the rest begins. Cool down and warm up gradually over a week or two.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The air should be dry to moderately humid: 30-50%. The species does poorly in humid, still air, so ventilation must be good. Provide a shallow, stable dish of fresh water, and change the water daily. Lightly misting part of the enclosure a couple of times a week gives the animal the chance to drink droplets. Spilled water must be removed, and wet substrate replaced. During the winter rest, humidity should be 60-70%, but the substrate must not be wet.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

Sceloporus jarrovii is diurnal and basks in strong light, so it needs powerful lighting 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 12-13 hours a day in summer and switched off completely at night. Day length can follow the seasons, with shorter days ahead of the winter rest. A bright, warm enclosure gets the animal to eat, mark its territory and breed.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Sceloporus jarrovii is a sit-and-wait hunter that eats beetles, grasshoppers, ants, wasps, caterpillars and spiders. Give a varied diet of live insects: crickets, small cockroaches, mealworms, morio worms, silkworms and the occasional waxworm. The insects should be small relative to the animal's head. Feed the feeder insects a nutritious diet for the last day before feeding.

Young animals 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 young, even if the UVB lighting is in order. If the animal becomes fat, cut back. Food is not given during the winter rest.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The animal is fast and alert and defends itself by fleeing and biting. It is an animal to watch, not to handle. If it has to be picked up, hold the body from neck to vent. Never grab the tail: it can break off and only partly regrows.

Both sexes are territorial, and males fight, so they must be housed separately. The male displays his blue throat and belly with push-ups. A male can be kept with one or two females in a spacious enclosure with many visual barriers and hiding places. New animals need to be left in peace for the first few weeks.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The male has a blue throat and blue belly patches and a thicker tail base. In the female the blue patches are faint or absent, and she is slightly smaller. Adults measure over 75 mm from snout to vent. The age at sexual maturity is not documented, so use only fully grown animals in good condition for breeding.

MATING

Sceloporus jarrovii mates in autumn, from September to November. The female can store the sperm over winter, and embryonic development only really gets going when it becomes warm in spring. A cool winter rest followed by warming and longer days is therefore a prerequisite for breeding. Put the female with the male under supervision, and separate them if he bites her too hard. Little is known about breeding in captivity.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species is live-bearing and has one litter a year with up to 14 young. The young are born from late May to late June. Give the pregnant 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. From mating in autumn to birth in early summer is 6-8 months (180-240 days), but embryonic development stands still for most of the winter. The female needs the same temperatures and the same basking spot as usual once the winter rest is over. Keep her alone in the enclosure as the birth approaches.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are small but 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

Animals in the trade are often wild-caught, so new animals must be quarantined for at least three months and have their faeces tested for parasites. Typical problems are:

- Mites and intestinal parasites in wild-caught animals.
- Bone loss from too little UVB and calcium.
- Dehydration and shedding problems from too little drinking water.
- Burns from heat lamps that are mounted too low or lack a guard.
- Stress and emaciation in newly caught animals that refuse food. Peace and plenty of hiding places help.
- Loss of the tail if the animal is held by the tail.
- Overheating if the enclosure is warm around the clock. The species is a mountain species and needs cool nights.

A healthy animal is quick, has clear eyes, a plump tail and no mites in the skin folds. An animal that loses weight, does not eat or breathes with an open mouth should go to 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.