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IGUANAS

Granite Spiny Lizard

Sceloporus orcutti

Sceloporus orcutti is a stout, dark rock lizard from southern California and Baja California. The male has a blue throat and belly, yellow and blue-green scales on the back and a broad violet stripe along the back. The species is diurnal, wary and fast, basks on granite boulders, feeds on insects and lays eggs. It needs a dry enclosure with crevices in stone, UVB and a hot basking spot.

Family: Phrynosomatidae Former name: *Sceloporus digueti*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**18-28 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-8 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**100 × 50 × 50 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**27-30 °C**
Basking spot	**38-42 °C**
Temperature, night	**16-22 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**9-12 °C** 8-12 weeks
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly, in pairs or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**6-15 eggs**
Incubation	**60-80 days** at 27-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Sceloporus orcutti is a large, sturdily built lizard with large, overlapping scales, each with a keel and a sharp point. The keels are strongest on the tail, so it looks especially spiny. The base colour is dark, rusty copper brown to almost black, and from a distance in bright sunlight the animal often looks completely black. On the side of the neck there is a dark, triangular wedge, and the body has dark crossbands, which can disappear when the animal is at its darkest. The colour changes with temperature: the animal is darkest when cold.

The male has a blue throat and belly, yellow and blue-green scales on the back and a broad violet stripe down the middle of the back. Some males look blue all over the body. He also has a swollen tail base and large pores on the underside of the hind thighs. The female has more distinct crossbands, but little or no blue on the underside. The young have a rusty red head and distinct bands and neck marks.

Adults are 8-12 cm from snout to vent and up to about 28 cm including the tail. It is named after the naturalist Charles Russell Orcutt, who collected the first specimen near Campo in San Diego County. There are no recognised subspecies. *Sceloporus digueti* from Baja California is today regarded as a synonym.

S. orcutti is an animal to look at, not a pet for handling. It is wary and fast and usually bites when caught. It is rare in captivity, and there are almost no descriptions of breeding.

Distribution and habitat

Sceloporus orcutti lives in southern California and on the Baja California peninsula in Mexico. In the USA it is found from the north side of San Gorgonio Pass and south along the lower slopes of the Peninsular Ranges. It is found both on the dry desert slopes, where there is sufficient plant cover, and on the coastal side of the mountains, from the interior almost down to the coast and north to the Santa Ana River. In Mexico the range extends far down Baja California, almost to the southern tip of the peninsula.

The species is found from sea level up to about 2,100 m. The type locality lies in San Diego County, a few hundred metres east of the town of Campo, at about 760-790 m elevation.

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

HABITAT

Sceloporus orcutti lives where there are large granite boulders and granite cliffs, mixed with scrub woodland (chaparral), pine, oak and palms. It basks on top of the large, pale boulders, where it can be seen from far away, and often flees round to the other side of the boulder when disturbed. It is a skilful climber and hides in crevices in the rock or under cover on the ground.

The animals are diurnal and active from spring to autumn. In winter they are inactive and hide in rock crevices. Mating takes place in March and April, the females lay eggs from May to July, and the young hatch from July to October.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little detailed knowledge exists about the care of *Sceloporus orcutti*, and the recommendations here are based on the species' habitat and on the genus. The figures for temperature, humidity, winter rest, incubation time and lifespan are borrowed from the other rock and spiny lizards of the genus, especially *Sceloporus magister*, *Sceloporus jarrovii* and *Sceloporus poinsettii*, which have the same basic requirements for sun, dryness and hiding places. Unlike *S. jarrovii* and *S. poinsettii*, *S. orcutti* lays eggs.

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 100 × 50 × 50 cm (length × width × height). A pair or a male with one or two females needs at least 120 × 60 × 50 cm, and more animals require more floor area. The lid must fit tightly, because the genus is fast and a good jumper.

The substrate is a sandy mixture of sand and a little soil. Furnish with flat stones, slate and cork, stacked stably on the floor so the animal cannot dig under them and make them slip. Build a sloping or flat basking rock at a suitable height, and many narrow crevices where the animal can retreat. The enclosure must stand on a solid base, because stones and substrate make it heavy.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation Read more: Incubating eggs

TEMPERATURE

By day the air should be 27-30 °C, and the basking spot should be 38-42 °C at the surface, measured with an infrared thermometer. Place the heat over a flat stone: the species lies flat against the heated stone to warm up quickly. The animal must always be able to withdraw from the heat to a cooler spot. If the enclosure is too cold, the animal becomes lethargic, and if it is hot everywhere, it digs in or seeks cover.

At night the heat is switched off, and the temperature falls to 16-22 °C. In winter a cool rest period in complete darkness at 9-12 °C for 8-12 weeks is suitable. The animal must be healthy and in good condition before the rest begins, and it is not fed during the rest.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The air should be dry to moderately humid: 30-50%. Ventilation must be good. Provide an easily accessible water dish, and change the water regularly. Mist leaves and the sides of the enclosure lightly so that droplets form for the animal to drink. Spilled water must be wiped up, and wet substrate replaced. During the winter rest the air should be moderately humid, 60-70%, but never wet.

LIGHTING AND UVB

S. orcutti is diurnal and heat-seeking and basks in bright light, so it needs strong lighting and UVB. Use a UVB tube in Ferguson zone 3 over the basking spot. The distance from the lamp to the animal should be kept within the manufacturer's instructions, often no more than 30 cm. UVB does not pass through glass or plastic.

The light should be on for at least 12 hours a day and off at night. Day length ideally follows the seasons, so the days are shorter before the winter rest. A bright, warm enclosure makes the animal eat, mark territory and breed, while one that is too dark and cool makes it lethargic.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Sceloporus orcutti eats small invertebrates, occasionally small lizards and a little fruit and flowers. In the enclosure it gets insects: crickets, small roaches, mealworms, superworm larvae, silkworms and the occasional waxworm. Vary the diet, because it is better than one or two kinds. Feeder insects must not be longer than the distance between the animal's eyes.

Juveniles are fed daily and adults every other day 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

Sceloporus orcutti is wary, fast and territorial. The male shows his blue throat and belly with push-ups, both to other males and to females. Both sexes defend a territory, and males of the same species must live apart, especially in the breeding season. A pair or a male with two females can be kept together in a roomy enclosure with many visual barriers and hides.

The animal is not suited to handling. It usually bites when caught and is hard to get out of a crevice once it has pulled in. Never grab the tail: it breaks off easily and can regrow, but does not look as before. New animals need peace for the first few weeks.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The male has a blue throat and belly, yellow and blue-green scales on the back, a swollen tail base and large pores on the underside of the hind thighs. The female has more distinct crossbands and little or no blue on the underside. The age of sexual maturity in captivity is not documented; the animals must be fully grown and in good condition before being used for breeding.

MATING

In the wild the species mates in March and April, as the days grow longer. A cool winter rest followed by rising warmth and day length is therefore the natural preparation. Put the female together with the male in a large enclosure, and separate them if he bites her too hard. Breeding in captivity is not documented.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays 6-15 eggs per clutch from May to July. How many clutches she lays per year is not documented. Provide a laying bin with moist sand and soil that the female can dig in. Give her plenty of food and calcium, and contact a vet if she strains without result or stops eating.

INCUBATION

In the wild the eggs hatch from July to October. Incubation is not documented for the species; 60-80 days at 27-30 °C is borrowed from *Sceloporus magister*. The eggs are placed in moist vermiculite or perlite and are not turned. They must be kept moist, but not wet.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are small and fend for themselves from hatching. Give them a small enclosure with the same temperatures, stones, basking spot and UVB as the adults, and feed them daily with small insects, dusted with calcium with D3 once a week. Keep them singly or in small groups of the same size, and separate the males when they get their colour, because they quickly become territorial.

Health and common mistakes

The species is rare in captivity, and about one in four wild animals has intestinal worms. New animals must be quarantined and have their droppings examined for parasites. Typical problems are:

- Intestinal parasites in animals from the wild.
- Lethargy and poor condition from too little light and heat.
- Obesity, if the animal is overfed.
- Burns, if the heat lamp is too low or lacks a guard.
- Stress in new animals that refuse food. Peace and many hides help.
- Loss of the tail, if the animal is held by the tail.

A healthy animal is fast, has clear eyes and a plump tail. Lifespan in captivity is not documented; the 5-8 years are borrowed from *Sceloporus magister*. An animal that loses weight, does not eat or breathes with its mouth open must go to a vet with experience of reptiles.

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.