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IGUANAS

Crevice Spiny Lizard

Sceloporus poinsettii

Sceloporus poinsettii is a robust, rough-scaled rock lizard from southern New Mexico, Texas and northern Mexico. It is greyish brown with a black collar and black bands on the tail, and the male has blue patches on the belly. The species is diurnal, shy and fast, feeds on insects and needs a dry enclosure with crevices in rock, UVB and a hot basking spot. It gives birth to live young.

Family: Phrynosomatidae Former name: *Sceloporus poinsetti*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**15-30 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**4-8 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	**26-30 °C**
Basking spot	**35-40 °C**
Temperature, night	**15-20 °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	**2-11 young**
Clutches per year	**1**
Gestation	**60-120 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Sceloporus poinsettii is a compact, heavily built lizard with stiff, keeled scales, so the skin feels rough and spiny. The colour is most often grey but can lean towards reddish brown, and the throat has a black collar with a white edge. The belly is pale grey, and the male often has blue patches on each side of it. The tail has black bands.

Adults reach 15-30 cm in length including the tail. The body measures up to about 12 cm from snout to vent, and the largest animals reach about 31 cm. There is no obvious size difference between the sexes.

The species name honours Joel Roberts Poinsett, an American physician, botanist and politician, who also gave his name to the poinsettia (*Poinsettia*). The species was described in 1852 by Baird and Girard. Several subspecies are recognised, among them *Sceloporus poinsettii axtelli* in New Mexico and Texas, *Sceloporus poinsettii amydrus*, *Sceloporus poinsettii macrolepis* from Durango and *Sceloporus poinsettii polylepis* from Chihuahua. They differ mostly in scale size and in how distinct the crossbands on the back are.

S. poinsettii is shy, nervous and very fast and flees into the nearest crevice. The species is rare in captivity, and breeding is hardly described.

Distribution and habitat

Sceloporus poinsettii lives in southern New Mexico and western and central Texas in the USA, where it occurs in the Chihuahuan Desert and on the Edwards Plateau. In Mexico it is found in the border states from the Sierra Madre Occidental in Sonora and eastwards through Chihuahua, Coahuila and Nuevo León. Further south the range is less well known: the species occurs throughout Durango and parts of Zacatecas, with records from San Luis Potosí and on the Pacific slopes of the Sierra Madre Occidental in northern Jalisco.

The type locality of the original subspecies is either the southern part of the Big Burro Mountains or the area around Santa Rita in Grant County, New Mexico.

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

HABITAT

Sceloporus poinsettii prefers semi-arid areas, often with limestone, where there are many holes and easily accessible crevices. It is a rock-dwelling species that basks on rocks and cliff faces and flees up the rock or into a crevice when disturbed.

It is diurnal and heat-seeking. The climate across the range is hot and dry in summer with cool nights and a cool winter, especially at altitude. The female mates in spring and gives birth to live young in midsummer.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

There is little knowledge about the husbandry of *Sceloporus poinsettii*, and the recommendations are based on the species' habitat and on better-known relatives. The figures for temperature, humidity, winter rest and lifespan are borrowed from *Sceloporus jarrovii*, *Sceloporus magister* and *Sceloporus cyanogenys*, which have the same requirements for sun, dryness and hiding places.

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 close tightly, because the animal is fast and jumps well.

The substrate is coarse sand mixed with unfertilised garden soil, 5-10 cm deep. Build a rock landscape of flat stones, slate and cork in stable stacks with many narrow crevices where the animal can retreat and feel secure. The crevices should be found at several heights. The stones must stand directly on the floor, so that the animal cannot dig in under them and make them shift. The enclosure should be placed where it is quiet, and the air should not be stagnant.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

TEMPERATURE

The enclosure needs a clear gradient. The air should be 26-30 °C by day, and the basking spot should be 35-40 °C at the surface, measured with an infrared thermometer. Use a halogen spot above 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 produces sluggish animals, and too hot everywhere makes them seek cover.

At night the heat lamp is switched off, and the temperature drops to 15-20 °C. In winter a cool rest period of 8-12 °C for 8-12 weeks is suitable, completely dark 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, stagnant air, so ventilation must be good. Provide a low, 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. Spilt water must be removed, and wet substrate replaced. During winter rest the air should be moderately humid, 60-70%, but not wet.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Sceloporus poinsettii is diurnal and basks in strong light, so it needs bright lighting and UVB. Use a T5 HO tube (Ferguson zone 3) in a reflector above the basking spot, and keep the distance within the manufacturer's recommendation, typically no more than 30 cm from the animal. UVB does not pass through glass or plastic. Replace the tubes according to the manufacturer's instructions.

The light should be on for 12-13 hours a day in summer and switched off completely at night. Day length can follow the seasons, with shorter days ahead of winter rest. A bright, warm enclosure gets the animal to eat, mark territory and breed.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Sceloporus poinsettii eats insects and other small arthropods, especially beetles and spiders, and occasionally takes a little soft plant material. Give a varied diet of live insects: crickets, small roaches, mealworms, superworms, silkworms and the occasional waxworm. The insects should be small relative to the animal's head, no more than a third of the width of the jaws, and preferably soft. Feed the feeder insects a nutritious diet for the last day before feeding.

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 lighting is in order. If the animal becomes fat, cut down. Food is not given during winter rest.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The animal is shy, nervous and very fast and defends itself by fleeing into crevices. It is an animal to watch, not to handle, and it is hard to get out again once it has retreated into a crevice. 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 watchful and territorial, and males fight, so they must be housed separately. The male displays his blue belly patches with push-ups. A male can be kept with one or two females in a spacious enclosure with many visual barriers and hides. New animals need to be left in peace for the first few weeks.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The male has blue patches on the belly, a thicker tail base and larger pores on the underside of the hind thighs. The female is more subdued and has little or no blue. The age of sexual maturity in captivity is not documented; the animals must be fully grown and in good condition before they are used for breeding.

MATING

In the wild the breeding season begins in spring, when the days get longer. A cool winter rest followed by warming up and longer days is therefore a prerequisite for breeding. Put the female together with the male under supervision, and separate them if he bites her too hard. Captive breeding is hardly described.

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

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species is live-bearing and has one litter a year in midsummer. A litter is up to 11 young; the smallest number is not documented. 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. The length of gestation is not documented; 60-120 days is an estimate based on mating taking place in spring and birth in midsummer. The female should have the same temperatures and the same basking spot as usual. Keep her alone in the enclosure as 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, stones, basking spot and UVB as the adults. Feed them daily on 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 of *Sceloporus poinsettii* in the trade are often wild-caught, so new animals must be quarantined for at least three months and have their faeces examined 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 many hides help.
- Loss of the tail if the animal is held by the tail.
- Overheating if the enclosure is warm around the clock. The species needs cool nights.

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