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LACERTIDS

Erhard's Wall Lizard

Podarcis erhardii

Podarcis erhardii is a medium-sized, diurnal wall lizard from Greece and the surrounding countries, especially the Aegean islands. It reaches 15-23 cm including the tail, is grey, brown or greenish with very variable markings, and feeds on arthropods. The species is common in the wild, but little is known about its care.

Family: Lacertidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**15-23 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Rocky terrain and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**100 × 50 × 50 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**22-30 °C**
Basking spot	**40-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**14-18 °C**
Humidity	**40-60%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**8-12 °C** 8-12 weeks
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**In pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**1-4 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**35-45 days** at 26-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Podarcis erhardii is a medium-sized lizard with a relatively broad head and smooth skin. The body (snout to vent) is 5-8 cm in adults, and the tail is about twice as long as the body, so the animals are 15-23 cm in total. Hatchlings are about 3 cm.

Colour and pattern vary greatly. The base colour is most often grey or brown, sometimes green. Females are often striped: two white stripes at the sides of the back border two dark stripes or rows of spots, and a dark line may run down the middle of the back. Some males have a net pattern of longitudinal and transverse lines and spots. The belly and often the throat are white, yellow, orange or red, and on the Aegean islands also green, blue or grey. Both sexes occur in three throat colours, orange, yellow and white, and orange males are often larger and bite harder than yellow and white ones.

The species is divided into many island forms and subspecies. It has the same way of life as *Podarcis muralis* and *Podarcis siculus*.

Distribution and habitat

Podarcis erhardii lives on the Greek mainland, in Albania, North Macedonia and southern Bulgaria and on many of the Aegean islands, including Naxos, Santorini, Tinos, Andros, Crete and the Northern Sporades. It is not found on Milos and the surrounding islands, because another species lives there. The map shows only the countries where the species is native.

> **Native range:** Greece, Albania, North Macedonia and Bulgaria.

HABITAT

Podarcis erhardii lives in open, dry and stony areas with low, dense vegetation of thorny scrub (phrygana) and maquis, where it can hide. It is particularly common in broken terrain and around man-made structures such as dry-stone walls and terraces, and it climbs well. The species is found from rocky islets and sandy coasts up to mountain tops at 2,000 metres. It is diurnal and basks on stones.

The diet is arthropods, especially beetles, grasshoppers and soft insect larvae, and in smaller amounts snails and a little fruit. Cannibalism occurs. Mating takes place in spring, and females lay eggs from April to July. The young hatch in late summer and in September.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Podarcis erhardii*. The figures for temperature, humidity, UVB, lifespan and incubation are therefore borrowed from *Podarcis muralis* and *Podarcis siculus*, which have the same way of life and a similar climate. The range has hot, dry summers and mild, rainy winters.

A pair needs at least 100 × 50 × 50 cm, and each additional female requires about 20 cm more in length. The species is active and climbs, so the enclosure should be full of vertical and sloping surfaces. An outdoor summer enclosure or mesh cage in a sunny garden from May to September is an advantage, but with a covered section, so that rain is kept out. The enclosure must be escape-proof with fine mesh, a tight lid and a buried edge.

Furnish with stacked stones, slate slabs, cork and roots, so there are many basking spots and hides. The substrate is coarse sand mixed with a little soil. Keep one pair per enclosure: two males will fight. Animals from different areas are not mixed, and the species is not kept together with other lizard species. In the breeding season a shallow container of damp sand should be provided for egg-laying.

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

TEMPERATURE

By day the temperature should be 22-30 °C, and the basking spot should be 40-45 °C at the surface, measured with an infrared thermometer. Use a spotlight over a flat stone, and only heat part of the enclosure, so the animals can choose for themselves. At night the temperature falls to 14-18 °C.

In winter the animals are kept cooler, at 8-12 °C, for 8-12 weeks with a short day, few feedings and a little moisture. The figures are an estimate based on the winter climate of the range. Frost must be avoided.

Animals that gape with an open mouth or lie flat and hide all day are too hot. Animals that only come out late in the morning are too cold.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be moderate: 40-60 % by day. The enclosure must be able to dry out completely, because still, humid air causes skin problems and fungus.

Provide a shallow, clean water bowl, and mist lightly once a day, early, so that everything is dry by evening. The animals also drink droplets from stones and plants. Keep one corner of the substrate slightly damp for females and young, without making the whole enclosure damp.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Podarcis erhardii is diurnal and lives in open, sunlit terrain, so the enclosure needs strong heat and UVB light. The species probably belongs to Ferguson zone 3, with a UV index of about 3-5 at the basking spot. A T5 tube with 10 % UVB, positioned according to the manufacturer's instructions, is a good solution. Supplement with daylight or LED over the rest of the enclosure.

Day length should follow the seasons: about 10 hours in winter and up to 14 hours in midsummer. Glass and Perspex block UVB, so sunbathing outdoors must take place through mesh. Replace UVB tubes according to the manufacturer's instructions, typically every year.

FEEDING

Podarcis erhardii eats mostly small arthropods. The feeder insects can be crickets, small grasshoppers, flies, fruit flies, springtails, spiders and woodlice, and mealworms and wax worms only in small amounts. The food must be small, no larger than the distance between the animal's eyes. A small amount of fruit purée now and then is a good variation.

Adults are fed every other day with as much as they eat in 10-15 minutes. Young are fed daily with very small insects. Dust the food lightly with calcium at most feedings and with a D3 supplement once every 1-2 weeks. Females that are laying eggs have a great need for calcium, so a bowl of crushed cuttlebone should be available.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Podarcis erhardii is fast and alert and flees when disturbed. Males are territorial, and two males together will fight. A pair is the safest way to keep them, and two females can usually be kept together in a large enclosure with many hides. Adults can eat young, so young are kept apart from the adults.

The animals should not be picked up. They drop the tail when stressed or caught, and it grows back, but altered. If an animal has to be moved, it is caught in a transparent container. Fixed routines gradually make them more secure, but they seldom become tame.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Males are larger and sturdier and have a broader head and stronger colours than females, while females are often striped and more subdued. Young cannot be sexed reliably.

The age at sexual maturity has not been documented. The species lives 5-10 years.

MATING

Mating takes place in spring. A cool period followed by increasing day length starts breeding. The male chases the female and holds on to her during mating, so the female must have the opportunity to withdraw into hiding. One pair per enclosure is the safest way to keep them.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Females lay eggs from April to July, most often one clutch a year and sometimes a second clutch in mid to late summer. A clutch is usually 1-3 eggs, rarely more. The first clutch averages 1.4-2.9 eggs depending on the island: females on islands with few predators lay the fewest. The female digs a hole in damp sand and covers the eggs, so the enclosure should have a shallow container with at least 10 cm of slightly damp sand. Check it daily in the season, because eggs that are not found easily dry out.

A female that does not find a suitable site can become egg-bound. Signs are a clearly swollen, lethargic female that does not eat. She must then go to a vet.

INCUBATION

Carefully dig up the eggs, and place them in a closed container with slightly damp vermiculite or perlite with small ventilation holes. Mark the top of the eggs, and do not turn them. The eggs must not lie in water and must not dry out.

At 26-28 °C the eggs hatch after about 35-45 days. In the wild the young hatch in late summer. Keep the temperature even with an incubator with a thermostat. Infertile eggs collapse and go mouldy, while fertile eggs turn white and firm.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are about 3 cm at hatching and must immediately go into a separate enclosure, because the adults can eat them. An enclosure of about 50 × 30 × 30 cm with hides, a basking spot and UVB suits a clutch for the first few months. Young of the same age can be kept together in small groups, as long as there are plenty of hides.

First foods are fruit flies, springtails and very small crickets, later small grasshoppers and woodlice. Feed daily, dust with calcium, and provide strong UVB light, so that bone disease does not develop. Young grow quickly and must not go short of food.

Health and common mistakes

The typical problems are the same as in other *Podarcis*:

- Bone disease (metabolic bone disease) from too little UVB and calcium. The animals become lethargic and have soft jaws and deformed legs.
- Mouth rot (infection in the mouth), especially with stress and too low a temperature.
- Mites on the skin and in the corners of the eyes. New animals must be quarantined.
- Intestinal worms and other parasites, especially in wild-caught animals.
- Egg binding in females without a suitable site for egg-laying.
- Shedding problems and fungal infections with persistent damp.
- Bite wounds and lost tails from stress and fighting between males.

If an animal does not eat for more than a week outside the cool period, is lethargic or swollen, or has difficulty using its legs, it must go to a vet with experience in reptiles.

Read more: Common diseases and signs of illness Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

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.