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LACERTIDS

Ibiza Wall Lizard

Podarcis pityusensis

Podarcis pityusensis is a robust, diurnal lizard from Ibiza, Formentera and the surrounding islets of the Balearics. It reaches 15-25 cm including the tail, is most often greenish with a pale stripe along the side and feeds on small arthropods, especially ants, and a little plant matter. It can live to a great age. Many island populations have their own colours and size. The species is threatened in the wild.

Family: Lacertidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**15-25 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**10-30 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	**15-20 °C**
Humidity	**40-60%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**12-15 °C** 8-12 weeks
Diet	**Insects, fruit and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**In pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**18-24 months**
Clutch size	**1-4 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-3**
Incubation	**30-43 days** at 29-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex A**
IUCN	**Endangered (EN)**

About the species

Podarcis pityusensis is a sturdily built lizard with a short head, a round body and relatively coarse, faintly keeled scales. The body (snout to vent) reaches about 7 cm in most animals, but on the islet of Es Vaixell off the west coast of Ibiza the males can reach almost 10 cm. The tail is about twice as long as the body, so adults are typically 15-25 cm in total. Males are larger, have a broader head and stronger colours than females. Hatchlings are about 3 cm (snout to vent).

The upper side is most often green, but can be grey or brownish, with a distinct pale stripe along the side and often a row of dark spots or a dark line along the back. The underside is white, cream, grey, orange or pink, and the throat often has dark spots. Colours, size and pattern vary greatly from island to island: more than 20 subspecies have been described, and even the

smallest islets have their own population.

The species is closely related to *Podarcis lilfordi* from Mallorca and Menorca. In the enclosure it is shy and fast.

The species can live to a great age. On Es Vaixell wild animals live for more than 10 years, and in captivity animals of 18 and up to 30 years are known.

Distribution and habitat

Podarcis pityusensis is native to Ibiza and Formentera in the Pityusic Islands, the south-western part of the Balearics in Spain, and to about 30 small islets around Ibiza and several around Formentera, including Es Vedrà, Tagomago, Conillera and Espalmador. Each islet has its own population, and many have been described as separate subspecies. It occurs from the coast up to about 475 m above sea level.

The species has been introduced in several places outside its natural range, including the port of Palma on Mallorca, Barcelona and the island of Gaztelugatxe on the Basque coast, but only the original range is shown on the map. On Ibiza the population is declining. The introduced horseshoe whip snake *Hemorrhois hippocrepis* came to the island in 2003 with olive trees, had by 2018 spread to almost half the area of the island and eats the lizards. In areas with the snake the lizards are greatly reduced or have disappeared, and at least one islet form is extinct.

> **Native range:** Spain.

HABITAT

Podarcis pityusensis lives on rocks, stone fences, dry-stone walls, olive groves, gardens, grazing land and farmland, especially near the coast, and in Mediterranean scrub with open, sunlit stones. On some small islets it lives almost exclusively on bare rock with very little vegetation. It is diurnal, basks on open stones and seeks shade in the middle of the day in summer.

The climate is mild and dry with hot summers and mild winters. The diet is small arthropods, in large quantities ants, and on the coast also woodlice. The animals also eat plant parts and fruit, mostly in summer. Cannibalism is common, especially on small islets with scarce food: adults eat young, and the animals bite tails and toes off each other.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little documented knowledge exists about the care of *Podarcis pityusensis*. The climate of the range is hot and dry with mild winters, and *Podarcis lilfordi* from the same islands has almost the same requirements. The figures for temperature, humidity, UVB, winter period, number of clutches and incubation are borrowed from it and from *Podarcis muralis* and *Podarcis siculus*.

A pair needs at least 100 × 50 × 50 cm. More floor area is better, because the species is active and uses the whole enclosure, including the vertical surfaces. An outdoor enclosure is suitable in summer, but it must be covered with glass or a roof, so that rain is kept out and the substrate can dry. 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 that are easy to reach and can dry out. The substrate is coarse sand mixed with a little soil. Animals from different islands should not be mixed. Keep one pair per enclosure: two males will fight, and one male with two females can stress one of the females. 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

The gradient is the most important thing. The basking spot should be 40-45 °C at the surface, measured with an infrared thermometer, and the rest of the enclosure 22-30 °C by day. 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 may fall to 15-20 °C.

In winter the animals are kept cooler, at 12-15 °C, with a day of about 10 hours, few feedings and a little moisture. A cool period of 8-12 weeks gives a natural annual rhythm and promotes breeding. 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, but without making the whole enclosure damp.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Podarcis pityusensis is diurnal and lives in full sun, so the enclosure needs strong heat and UVB light. It 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. Change it gradually with a timer. 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 pityusensis eats mostly small arthropods and also takes a little plant matter. The feeder insects can be crickets, small grasshoppers, flies, fruit flies, springtails, spiders and woodlice, and mealworms and wax worms only in small amounts. Ant pupae are a natural and nutritious supplement. The food must be small, no larger than the distance between the animal's eyes. A little ripe, sweet fruit now and then is a good variation, especially in summer.

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 pityusensis is fast and shy in the enclosure, but active and curious when it feels secure. Males are territorial, and keeping two males together is not recommended. 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 eat young and bite off tails, so young must always be kept apart from the adults.

The animals should not be picked up. They flee and drop the tail when stressed or caught, and the tail grows back, but altered. If an animal has to be moved, it is caught in a transparent container. Calm movements and fixed routines gradually make them more secure, but they seldom become completely tame. The species cannot be recommended together with other lizard species.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Males are larger and sturdier, with a broader head, stronger colours and more distinct femoral pores than females. Females are slimmer and more subdued. Young cannot be sexed reliably.

Podarcis pityusensis becomes sexually mature when it is 1.5-2 years old.

MATING

The breeding season is in spring and early summer. A cool period followed by increasing day length starts breeding. The male chases the female, bites her on the tail or flank and holds on during mating. Keep the female in good condition and with the opportunity to withdraw, so she does not become stressed. One pair per enclosure is the safest way to keep them.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The clutch is 1-4 eggs. In the wild females usually lay only one clutch a year, in captivity up to three. 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 29-30 °C the eggs hatch after about 30-43 days. Keep the temperature even with an incubator with a thermostat, and avoid more than 30 °C. Infertile eggs collapse and go mouldy, while fertile eggs turn white and firm.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are about 3 cm (snout to vent) at hatching and must immediately go into a separate enclosure, because the adults eat both young and tails. 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

Little documented knowledge exists about diseases in the species. 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.