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LACERTIDS

Balkan Wall Lizard

Podarcis tauricus

Podarcis tauricus is a robust, diurnal, ground-dwelling lizard from south-eastern Europe and Asia Minor. It reaches 20-24 cm including the tail, is brown and green with two pale stripes along the side, and lives in open places with sand, grass and scattered vegetation. The species is common in the wild, but little is known about its care.

Family: Lacertidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**20-24 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**5-10 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial**
Habitat	**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	**2-10 eggs**
Clutches per year	**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 tauricus is a sturdily built lizard with a relatively deep head, somewhat reminiscent of a small green lizard. The body (snout to vent) is about 6-8 cm in adults, and the tail is more than twice as long, so the animals are 20-24 cm in total.

The colour is pale green in spring and becomes more olive green or olive brown over the summer. The pattern varies, but often consists of two narrow, pale stripes along the flank and a brownish mid-back with black spots. The belly is white and unspotted, but breeding males get a yellow, orange or red belly and a green throat.

The species resembles *Podarcis muralis*, to which it is closely related, but is more ground-dwelling and lives in more open terrain. The delimitation of the species is not settled. Genetic studies divide the species group around *P. tauricus* into up to nine lineages, and the populations in Albania and western Greece are often treated as a separate species, *Podarcis ionicus*. *Podarcis gaigeae* from Skyros was formerly a subspecies.

Distribution and habitat

Podarcis tauricus lives in south-eastern Europe and Asia Minor: in south-western Ukraine and Crimea, southern Moldova, eastern and southern Romania, south-eastern Hungary, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania and mainland Greece, as well as in Thrace and north-western Turkey. Hungary is the north-western limit of the continuous range. A single, distant population in southern Moravia in the Czech Republic was found recently, and it may be native or introduced. The map shows only the countries where the species is native.

> **Native range:** Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Hungary, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania and Turkey.

HABITAT

Podarcis tauricus lives on open, sandy terrain with sparse vegetation: steppes, grassland, meadows, field edges, olive groves, farmland, rural gardens, vegetated dunes and occasionally open scrub. It is ground-dwelling and climbs only a little. It lives in lowland and hill country up to 1,800 m. It is diurnal, basks and hunts actively for prey.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Podarcis tauricus*, so the figures for care, incubation time and lifespan are borrowed from *Podarcis muralis*. It is a close relative with a similar climate, but *P. tauricus* is more ground-dwelling and lives in more open terrain. *Podarcis erhardii* and *Podarcis siculus* belong to the same genus and have similar requirements.

A pair needs at least 100 × 50 × 50 cm, and each additional female requires about 20 cm more in length. The species uses mainly the floor, so floor area matters more than height. An outdoor summer enclosure or mesh cage in a sunny garden from May to September is an advantage, but with a covered section to keep the rain out. The enclosure must be escape-proof, with fine mesh, a tight lid and a buried edge.

Furnish with coarse sand mixed with a little soil, flat stones, slate slabs, cork and roots, so there are plenty of basking spots and hiding places. Keep one pair per enclosure: two males form territories and fight. Animals from different areas are not mixed, and the species is not kept together with other lizard species. In the breeding season there should be a shallow container of moist sand for egg-laying.

Read more: Incubating eggs

TEMPERATURE

By day it 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 heat only part of the enclosure so the animals can choose for themselves: the preferred body temperature in the closely related *P. muralis* is around 30 °C. 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 darkness, few feedings and a little moisture. 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 stagnant, humid air causes skin problems and fungus.

Provide a shallow, clean water dish, and mist lightly once a day, early, so that everything is dry by the evening. Keep one corner of the substrate slightly moist for females and juveniles, without making the whole enclosure damp.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

Podarcis tauricus is diurnal and lives in open, sunlit terrain, so the enclosure needs strong heat and UVB light. The species belongs to Ferguson zone 3, with a UV index of around 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 acrylic block UVB, so basking outdoors must take place through mesh. Replace the UVB tube according to the manufacturer's instructions, typically every year.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Podarcis tauricus eats small arthropods. Feeder insects can be crickets, small locusts, flies, fruit flies, springtails, spiders and woodlice, and mealworms and waxworms only in small amounts. The food must be small, at most the size of the distance between the animal's eyes.

Adults are fed every other day with as much as they eat in 10-15 minutes. Juveniles are fed daily with very small animals. Dust the food lightly with calcium at most feedings and with a D3 supplement once every 1-2 weeks. Females that lay eggs have a large calcium requirement, so a dish of crushed cuttlebone should be available.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Podarcis tauricus is fast and alert, often basks in the open and flees when disturbed. Males form territories and defend them against other males, 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 hiding places. Adults may eat juveniles, so juveniles are kept apart from the adults.

The animals should not be picked up. They drop the tail when stressed or caught, and it regrows, but changed. If an animal has to be moved, it is caught in a transparent container. Regular routines make them gradually more confident, but they rarely become tame.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Males are sturdier than females, and breeding males have a yellow, orange or red belly and a green throat, while females are more subdued. Juveniles cannot be sexed reliably.

Age at sexual maturity is not documented for *Podarcis tauricus*.

MATING

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

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Females lay two clutches a year of 2-10 eggs. Small, young females lay the fewest eggs. The female digs a hole in moist sand and covers the eggs, so the enclosure should have a shallow container with at least 10 cm of slightly moist sand. Check it daily in the season, because eggs that are not found easily dry out.

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

INCUBATION

Dig the eggs up gently, and place them in a closed container with slightly moist vermiculite or perlite with small air 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 35-45 days, and at lower temperatures it takes longer. An incubator with a thermostat keeps the temperature even. Unfertilised eggs collapse and go mouldy, while fertilised eggs turn white and firm.

REARING THE YOUNG

In *Podarcis muralis* the young measure 5-6 cm including the tail at hatching, and in *P. tauricus* they are probably of the same size. They must go straight into an enclosure of their own, because the adults may eat them. An enclosure of about 50 × 30 × 30 cm with hides, a basking spot and UVB suits a clutch for the first months. Young of the same age can go together in small groups as long as there are plenty of hiding places.

First foods are fruit flies, springtails and very small crickets, later small locusts, small spiders and woodlice. Feed daily, dust with calcium, and provide strong UVB light so that bone disease does not develop. Juveniles grow fast 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 place to lay.
- 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 of 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.