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LACERTIDS

Argentine Black and White Tegu

Salvator merianae

Salvator merianae is the largest of the tegus: a powerful, intelligent, diurnal lizard from eastern and central South America with black and white bands. Males reach up to 150 cm and weigh several kilos. The species needs a purpose-built enclosure of at least 300 × 150 × 150 cm, a deep, humid digging substrate, strong heat and UVB, and it lives for 15-20 years. In the wild it spends 4-6 months of the year in brumation.

Family: Teiidae Former name: *Tupinambis merianae*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**80-150 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**2,500-8,000 g**
Lifespan	**15-20 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Savanna, dry forest and rainforest**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**300 × 150 × 150 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-35 °C**
Basking spot	**52-57 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-23 °C**
Humidity	**70-80%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**15-20 °C** 17-22 weeks
Diet	**Insects, fruit, plants, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**24-36 months**
Clutch size	**18-25 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**40-75 days** at 29-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult male needs an enclosure of at least 300 × 150 × 150 cm (length × width × height), and an adult female at least 240 × 120 × 120 cm. Enclosures this large must be built or ordered specially. Bigger is better.

TEMPERATURE

Salvator merianae needs a clear gradient. The basking spot has a surface temperature of 52-57 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer. The warm side of the enclosure is 32-35 °C and the cool side 24-29 °C.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The humidity in the enclosure should be 70-80 %. Keep it up by watering the substrate until it is evenly damp but not muddy, and repeat this weekly, and by misting daily. Several short mistings work better than one long one.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Salvator merianae is diurnal and needs strong light and UVB for 12-14 hours a day.

FEEDING

Salvator merianae is omnivorous and needs a varied diet. An adult gets about 60 % animal food, 30 % vegetables and 10 % fruit.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Salvator merianae is intelligent and curious and can learn to respond to its name, solve small tasks to reach food and follow simple commands.

NATIVE RANGE

Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina.