herpy

LACERTIDS

North African Ocellated Lizard

Timon pater

Timon pater is a large, diurnal lizard from northern Algeria and Tunisia and a close relative of the European *Timon lepidus*. Its care is based on *T. lepidus* and *Timon tangitanus*: a large enclosure, strong heat and UVB, a cool winter rest and, ideally, an outdoor enclosure in summer.

Family: Lacertidae Former name: *Lacerta lepida pater*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**40-60 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**17 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling, terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Rocky terrain and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 60 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**22-30 °C**
Basking spot	**35-50 °C**
Temperature, night	**15-20 °C**
Humidity	**40-70%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Winter rest	**8-15 °C** 6-8 weeks
Diet	**Insects and fruit**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**10-16 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**78-96 days** at 26 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Timon pater belongs to the genus *Timon*, large, heavily built lizards with a broad head, powerful jaws and a long tail. The species used to be treated as the subspecies *Lacerta lepida pater* of the ocellated lizard *Timon lepidus*. Members of the genus are green to olive-green with dark markings and blue spots on the flanks. Markings and differences between the sexes are not documented for *T. pater*.

T. pater is slightly smaller than *T. lepidus*. Members of the genus reach up to 80 cm in total length, but most animals do not grow much longer than 60 cm, and males of the closely related *T. tangitanus* measure 43-45 cm. Adult *T. pater* are 40-60 cm in total, with about two thirds of the length being tail. Females are smaller than males. Lifespan is not documented for the species; *T. lepidus* can live for 17 years.

The name *pater* was formerly also used for animals from Morocco. The Moroccan animals belong to *T. tangitanus*, and older captive-bred stock sold as *pater* comes from them. Only animals from northern Algeria and Tunisia are *T. pater*, so it is an advantage to know where an animal comes from. The closely related *T. tangitanus* is less shy than *T. lepidus*; how *T. pater*

behaves is not documented.

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

Distribution and habitat

Timon pater lives in northern Algeria and in Tunisia. In Algeria it occurs in Khroumirie, on the High Plateaus, in the Aurès and in Kabylie, and animals have been found at up to 2,111 m in the Atlas Mountains. The type locality is Sétif in Algeria. Earlier records of heights up to 2,650 m referred to *T. tangitanus*. Whether the species occurs in eastern Morocco, east of the Moulouya river, is unresolved. The other member of the genus in Morocco is *T. tangitanus*.

The species is regarded as not threatened, but the population in north-eastern Algeria is declining.

> **Native range:** Algeria and Tunisia.

HABITAT

Timon pater has been studied mainly in El Kala National Park in the far north-east of Algeria: a wooded valley with cork oak, dense Mediterranean scrub (maquis), grasses, dwarf palms and a stream. The climate is dry with a Mediterranean influence, and most rain falls in winter. The animals are active by day, with a clear peak early in the morning and a smaller one around midday, and the pattern is the same in spring and summer.

The diet consists mostly of beetles and ants. Snails are important in August and grasshoppers in September, and a little plant matter is also eaten. Droppings from July and August are smaller than in the other months. How long the species rests in winter in the wild is not documented.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Timon pater*, and the figures here are borrowed from the closely related *Timon lepidus* and *Timon tangitanus*, which are better known in captivity. The climate in the species' range is Mediterranean, with hot, dry summers and cool winters.

An adult or a pair needs an enclosure of at least 120 × 60 × 60 cm (length × width × height). The species is active and uses the whole floor, and bigger is better. The enclosure needs good ventilation and front opening. The substrate is a mixture of sand and soil at least 10 cm deep so that the animals can dig. Furnish it with flat stones, rock features and thick branches as basking spots, with hiding places at both ends. Heavy stones must be fixed firmly, because the animals dig and topple anything that is not secured. Add a closed plastic container with damp soil and a hole in the side as a humid hide. The female lays her eggs there.

An outdoor enclosure in full sun in summer is the best solution. Use strong wire mesh with a mesh size of no more than 12 mm on all sides, including the bottom, bury the edge at least 15 cm, and provide shade and a dry shelter from rain. The animals are brought indoors when autumn turns cool.

TEMPERATURE

The basking spot should have a surface temperature of 35-50 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer. The air in the rest of the enclosure is kept at 22-30 °C by day, and the temperature drops to 15-20 °C at night. Heat comes from a halogen spot or a mercury vapour lamp; the mercury vapour lamp also gives UVB. Put the basking spot at one end so that the animal can choose.

The species comes from an area with cool winters, and a winter rest is natural and promotes breeding. Feeding stops in mid-October and the day length is shortened to around 8 hours. Finally heat and UVB are switched off, and the animals rest at 8-15 °C for 6-8 weeks, typically from the beginning of November to the beginning of January. The animals do not eat but must have access to water. Only healthy animals in good condition should be given a winter rest. After the rest the day length is increased gradually to 12 hours, UVB is switched on again, and only then are the animals fed again.

Read more: Lighting and UVB Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The air in the enclosure should be fairly dry, 40-70 %, but the animals must always be able to retreat to a humid hide. Keep the substrate dry on top and damp deeper down. Provide a shallow bowl of fresh water, changed often, from which the animals can drink.

After the winter rest the enclosure is misted every morning. The rising humidity and the longer days set off mating.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

Timon pater is diurnal and basks for several hours, so the enclosure needs plenty of light and strong UVB. Use a T5 HO tube of 10-12 % in a fitting with a reflector above the basking spot, or a mercury vapour lamp. The species is placed in Ferguson zone 3, like *T. lepidus*; the distance is decided with a UV meter. Glass and plastic block UVB, so the tube should be inside the enclosure or above open mesh.

The length of the day follows the season: 12-14 hours in summer and around 8 hours during the winter rest. Use a timer. Replace the UVB tube according to the manufacturer's instructions.

FEEDING

In the wild the diet consists mostly of beetles and ants, at times also snails and grasshoppers. Offer crickets, grasshoppers, cockroaches, mealworms and zophobas in a variety of sizes. Feed the insects well on greens and vegetables for a day before they are offered. Now and then a little very ripe fruit can be given. Pregnant females benefit from a newborn mouse once a week, because it covers their large calcium requirement.

Feed adults 3-4 times a week and juveniles every day or every second day. Do not give too much protein-rich food. Dust the insects with calcium at every feeding, with D3 if the animal does not receive UVB, and give a multivitamin once a week. The animals readily take food from tweezers.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The behaviour of *Timon pater* is not documented, so what follows is borrowed from the other members of the genus. The animals are curious and can take food from tweezers. Give a new animal a couple of weeks of peace and let it come to you. A bite from the powerful jaws can draw blood, but the animals seldom bite without reason. Females dislike being picked up in the breeding season, and gloves are best when they have to be moved.

Males are territorial. Never keep two males together. A pair or a male with a single female can be kept together in a large enclosure with many hiding places, but watch for bullying. During mating the male holds the female with his mouth, and this can cause scratches. Wash your hands after contact with the animals and the enclosure, because reptiles can carry *Salmonella*.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The sex cannot be determined reliably until after a few months. Males have a broader head and more powerful jaws than females. When *Timon pater* becomes sexually mature is not documented; females of the closely related *Timon tangitanus* typically lay eggs for the first time after their second winter.

MATING

Mating follows the winter rest. When the days have become longer, the heat is switched on again and the enclosure is misted in the morning, the male begins to chase the female. During mating the male bites hold of the female. If he chases her without a break and she clearly tries to get away, separate them for a time.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays her eggs at night under stones or bark in damp soil, or in the closed soil container. A clutch is typically 10-12 eggs and at most about 16 eggs in *T. tangitanus*; the figures for *T. pater* are not documented and are borrowed from that species. In *T. tangitanus* the female lays a second clutch 4-6 weeks after the first, but not a third. Keep the soil damp and diggable throughout the season, and give the female calcium and plenty of food. If she digs for more than a week without laying, she must see a vet.

INCUBATION

The eggs are removed and placed without turning in a closed container of damp vermiculite or perlite. A constant temperature of 26 °C without large fluctuations is used. Eggs of *T. tangitanus* must be kept drier than those of *Timon lepidus*, otherwise they are attacked by mould, so keep the substrate only slightly damp. The young hatch after 78-96 days. When the young animal has cut the shell open, it often rests in the egg until the yolk sac has been absorbed; let it come out at its own pace.

REARING THE YOUNG

Rearing of *Timon pater* is not documented. Juveniles of the genus are kept in small enclosures with hiding places, heat and UVB, fed every day on small insects dusted with calcium, and separated when they become territorial. In *T. tangitanus* green colours appear early, but the sex cannot be determined reliably until after several months.

Health and common mistakes

Most problems are caused by mistakes in husbandry: too little UVB, too little calcium, too little heat and too little exercise. The species is so poorly known in captivity that only the general experience of the genus can be used.

- Metabolic bone disease from too little UVB and calcium. Typical signs are weak legs and soft jaws.
- Overheating in outdoor enclosures without shade. The animals must always be able to find a cool spot.
- Parasites and mites in new animals. Quarantine them and have a faecal sample examined.
- Egg-laying difficulties if there is no suitable place to lay or the soil is too dry. This requires a vet.
- Weight loss and frost damage during the winter rest if the temperature is wrong or the animal was weak. End the rest if the animal loses weight.
- Bite wounds after mating and fights, and loss of the tail, which grows back but is shorter.

A healthy animal has clear eyes and a plump tail base and is active and curious. See a vet with reptile experience if the animal does not eat, loses weight or breathes with its mouth open.

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.