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SKINKS

Iberian Three-Toed Skink

Chalcides striatus

Chalcides striatus is a slender, almost snake-like skink from the Iberian Peninsula, southern France and Liguria with small legs, three toes on each foot and dark longitudinal stripes. It lives hidden in damp, low vegetation and gives birth to live young. Its care is almost unknown, so this guide is based on the species in the wild and on its relatives *Chalcides chalcides* and *Chalcides ocellatus*.

Family: Scincidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**28-43 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**12-20 g**
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**90 × 40 × 30 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**22-28 °C**
Basking spot	**32-35 °C**
Temperature, night	**15-20 °C**
Humidity	**40-70%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Winter rest	**8-12 °C** 8-12 weeks
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Sexually mature	**36-48 months**
Litter size	**4-15 young**
Clutches per year	**1**
Gestation	**58-86 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Chalcides striatus is a smooth, glossy skink with an elongated, cylindrical body, a broad, triangular head, a thick neck and very small legs of 4-7 mm ending in three toes. At first glance it looks like a snake. The ground colour is brownish, olive or bronze, sometimes greyish, with a much paler belly. Along the whole body run nine, sometimes eleven, dark brown longitudinal stripes, which may be indistinct and are bordered by rows of small black dots. In southern Spain and Portugal there are animals with no stripe pattern. Females are longer and thicker than males, but otherwise the sexes look alike.

Chalcides striatus closely resembles *Chalcides chalcides*. The legs are slightly larger, and the three toes on the hind foot are of equal length, whereas in *C. chalcides* the middle toe is longest. Adult females measure about 28-29 cm including the tail and weigh 12-20 g, the males are slightly smaller, and the species can reach about 43 cm. Lifespan in captivity is not documented;

10-15 years is borrowed from *Chalcides chalcides*.

The species was described by Cuvier in 1829. It was formerly treated as a subspecies of *C. chalcides*, but is now regarded as a separate species, although a few still consider the two to be very closely related forms. In captivity it is hardly described at all.

Distribution and habitat

Chalcides striatus lives on the Iberian Peninsula, in southern France and in Liguria in north-western Italy. On the peninsula it is widespread, but absent from large parts of the east: Murcia, Valencia, western Castilla-La Mancha and southern Aragón. It also occurs on the Atlantic coastal islands off Galicia and in an isolated population near Bordeaux. The species lives from sea level up to about 1,800 m.

> **Native range:** Portugal, Spain, Gibraltar, France and Italy.

HABITAT

Chalcides striatus is tied to low, herbaceous vegetation: meadows, green slopes, hedgerows, stream margins and bogs. In the dry Mediterranean climate it is found especially where humidity is high, typically in mountain regions and along coasts, and it is almost absent where rainfall is below 500 mm a year. Near the Atlantic it can also live on drier heath with low shrubs and gorse. It is abundant in the western part of the peninsula, but some populations in inland and eastern Spain are small and isolated. Habitat loss through scrub encroachment and the burning of field margins and stubble fields threatens the species.

The animal is diurnal. Activity extends from February to November with a peak in April-June; in the north it is shorter, roughly March-September. Most are seen in the middle of the day, but in the hottest months also early and late. When warm, the animal moves quickly and nimbly between the plants and at the slightest danger disappears into dense vegetation, under large stones or down into burrows in the ground. It hibernates deep in the soil. The diet is arthropods, especially spiders, beetles and ticks. Prey length is 1-36 mm; young animals take more insects and crustaceans and fewer spiders and snails.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Chalcides striatus*. The habitat is known: damp, dense, low vegetation with cool nights and a winter rest. This guide is based on that and on the closely related *Chalcides chalcides* and *Chalcides ocellatus*. Enclosure size, temperatures, humidity, UVB and winter rest are borrowed from *C. chalcides*.

A single animal needs an enclosure of at least 90 × 40 × 30 cm. Floor area is decisive, because the species moves in a snake-like way between grass stems and under cover. The enclosure should have a dense, loose substrate of at least 8 cm of a mix of topsoil and sand, in which the animal can burrow, a layer of dry grass or leaves on top, and tufts of grass or other plants that provide cover. Flat stones and cork must sit stably so they cannot fall on an animal burrowing beneath them. The lid must fit tightly, because the species squeezes through small gaps.

Avoid calcium sand, gravel and coarse substrate. Remove droppings and uneaten food regularly.

Read more: Lighting and UVB Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

TEMPERATURE

The species is diurnal and basks. The daytime temperature should be 22-28 °C with a basking spot of 32-35 °C air temperature, and the surface directly under the heat lamp can reach 40-45 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer. The animal must always be able to retreat to the cool side. At night the heat is switched off, and the temperature may fall to 15-20 °C.

In the wild the species hibernates deep in the soil. A cool winter rest of 8-12 weeks at 8-12 °C therefore suits it. Only healthy animals in good condition are given a winter rest. Lower the temperature gradually, and stop feeding when the animal no longer eats.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species lives in damp vegetation, but not in water. Humidity should be moderate, 40-70%, and the substrate should be slightly damp at depth and dry at the surface. Mist the enclosure lightly every second or third day so the lower layers stay damp, and provide good ventilation so the substrate does not turn mouldy. A shallow dish of fresh water should always be available.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal and basks, so it needs strong light and UVB. Ferguson zone 2 suits it: UV index 2-3 at the basking spot and lower in the rest of the enclosure. A T5 HO tube of 5-6% over the basking spot at a distance of 25-35 cm provides this. Glass and plastic block UVB. The light follows the seasons with about 10 hours in winter and 14 hours in summer, and a timer ensures a fixed rhythm.

FEEDING

In the wild *Chalcides striatus* eats arthropods, especially spiders, beetles and ticks; prey length is 1-36 mm. In the enclosure this corresponds to small, soft prey: crickets in small sizes, small roaches (e.g. *Blaptica dubia*), woodlice, mealworms and black soldier fly larvae. Variety is important.

Prey must be smaller than the animal's head. Young animals are fed daily, adults 2-3 times a week. Dust the food with calcium and, a couple of times a month, a multivitamin supplement. Monitor the animal's weight and body condition.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Chalcides striatus is shy and lives hidden. In the enclosure it is seen mostly when basking or hunting. It is fast and smooth and easily slips out of a hand, so it is not suited to handling. Give a new animal two to three weeks of peace, and do not move it unnecessarily.

During the breeding season the males gather and may fight and eat each other, so two males must not be kept together. The animal is best kept singly. How females can be kept together is not documented. Females are longer and thicker than males, but sex is hard to see in younger animals.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

In the wild sexual maturity is probably reached in the third or fourth year of life. Age in captivity is not documented. Females are longer and thicker than males; otherwise there are no clear external sex differences.

MATING

The breeding season begins shortly after the winter rest, when the animals have emerged. Males gather and may fight and eat each other, so males must be kept apart. A cool winter rest precedes mating and is probably necessary for a normal breeding cycle.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Chalcides striatus gives birth to live young and has a complex placenta, through which the mother nourishes the foetuses. The female has one litter a year. A litter averages 4-6 young and can reach up to 15; large females have more young than small ones. After birth the litter weighs about a third of the female's weight in total. The young are born in summer, in the wild from June to August. The female may die during birth. Give the pregnant female peace, plenty of food, UVB and many hiding places.

INCUBATION

Chalcides striatus has no incubation period, because the young are born alive. Gestation lasts 58-86 days, and birth takes place 29-63 days after the last mating.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

Captive breeding is not documented. The young are independent from birth, measure 7-9 cm and weigh about 0.6 g. They are fed like the adults on very small insects and woodlice, daily and dusted with calcium. Remove them from the adults, and give them loose substrate, hiding places and UVB.

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

Health and common mistakes

There is no documented health information for *Chalcides striatus* in captivity. Problems in related skinks are most often caused by husbandry:

- Too little UVB and calcium causes metabolic bone disease (MBD).
- Too little heat causes poor digestion and a weakened immune system; the animal must also be able to retreat to cool spots.
- A permanently wet substrate without ventilation causes mould and skin problems.
- Coarse or calcareous substrate can cause intestinal problems if swallowed.
- Males kept together fight and can injure each other.

A healthy animal has clear eyes, a plump body and smooth skin, and eats regularly. Signs of illness are emaciation, dull skin, loose droppings and lethargy. Animals in winter rest should be weighed. Have a health check with a vet experienced in reptiles.

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.