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SKINKS

Pink-Tongued Lizard

Cyclodomorphus gerrardii

Cyclodomorphus gerrardii is a slender, calm skink from eastern Australia with a pink tongue, dark crossbands and a long, weakly prehensile tail. The species grows to 40-45 cm, lives in humid forest, is most active at dusk and at night and in the wild feeds almost only on snails. It gives birth to live young, often many in each litter, and adults are very docile.

Family: Scincidae Former name: *Hemisphaeriodon gerrardii; Tiliqua gerrardii; Hinulia gerrardii*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**40-45 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**15-20 years**
Active	**At dusk and at night**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Rainforest and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 60 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**20-30 °C**
Basking spot	**33-36 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**60-80%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Winter rest	**16-22 °C** 8-12 weeks
Diet	**Insects, fruit, complete diet, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Sexually mature	**22-36 months**
Litter size	**10-30 young**
Gestation	**90-120 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Cyclodomorphus gerrardii has a slender but sturdy body, well-developed legs with long toes and sharp claws, and a long, weakly prehensile tail that is about as long as the body. The head is large with a distinct neck and is broader in the male than in the female. The base colour is slate grey to light brown with dark grey to black crossbands, which are most distinct in the male. The tongue is pink in adults. Juveniles are light grey with heavy black crossbands, dark spots on the head and a blue tongue and mouth, and they acquire the adults' colours within about three months. Completely patternless animals occur, and the patterns vary from population to population.

The species has changed genus several times and has been placed in *Hinulia*, *Hemisphaeriodon* and *Tiliqua*, and all the names can be seen in older literature. The genus *Cyclodomorphus* belongs together with the blue-tongued skinks in a group of large Australian skinks. The species name honours the British zoologist Edward Gerrard, who was John Edward Gray's closest colleague at the British Museum. Gray described the species in 1845.

The species resembles *Tiliqua scincoides*, but is far slimmer, with a smaller head, a longer and narrower tail and longer legs. If threatened, it lifts its body off the ground to look larger and flicks its tongue rapidly. Adults move slowly, are very calm and are among the most docile skinks. Juveniles are shyer and often empty their bowels when lifted. The species does not shed its tail as easily as faster skinks.

Distribution and habitat

Cyclodomorphus gerrardii lives in eastern Australia, along the coast and in the mountain ranges to the east, from the area around Cairns in north-eastern Queensland south to Springwood in the Blue Mountains in New South Wales. The species is found both in coastal areas and in higher-lying regions. The type locality is uncertainly given as Australia, but the synonyms were described from, among other places, Rockhampton, Johnstone River and Herbert River in Queensland.

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

The species lives in humid sclerophyll forest, rainforest and humid parts of woodland, both on the ground and in low vegetation. It lies hidden in leaf litter, in hollow trunks and in crevices in rocks and trees. In summer it is active at dusk and at night, in the cooler months also during the day. The slender body is adapted to dense undergrowth: in grass and on branches the animal holds its hind legs against its body and moves with sinuous movements of the body and tail, and the weakly prehensile tail is used as support when it climbs. The young climb more often than the adults.

The range extends across both temperate and tropical climate. Animals from the southern part of the range experience cooler winters and may be inactive for longer periods than animals from the north. The climate is humid, and therefore the enclosure's substrate must be kept slightly damp.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult animal needs an enclosure of at least 120 × 60 × 60 cm (length × width × height). The species digs, but also climbs a little on sloping branches and cork bark, so a light climbing structure is a plus. Larger is better, and the animal uses all the space it gets.

The animal is best kept alone. Two animals can occasionally manage together in a large enclosure with many hides, but they may fight, and two males must never be kept together. There must be at least two hides on the ground, whether there are one or two animals.

Use at least 10 cm of loose, slightly damp soil as substrate, for example a mix of topsoil without fertiliser and coconut soil, with a layer of leaf litter on top. The animal likes to dig down. Do not use pure sand or conifer shavings. Provide cork bark, root pieces and plants for hiding and perching, and place a flat stone under the heat lamp. Never use a heat rock with a built-in heating element. The enclosure must have a secure mesh lid, so there is both air exchange and light.

TEMPERATURE

The air temperature must be 25-30 °C during the day, with a cool end of 20-25 °C. The surface of the basking spot must be 33-36 °C. Measure the surface temperature with an infrared thermometer and the air temperature at both ends. The heat comes from a halogen spot or a heat lamp above the mesh, controlled by a thermostat.

At night the temperature must fall to about 20 °C and not below 18 °C. If it gets colder, use a heating element without light. A pregnant female needs a basking spot where the temperature reaches 36-37 °C.

A cool period of two to three months in winter promotes breeding. Stop feeding about a week before, and then lower the temperature over one to two weeks to 16-18 °C at night and 20-22 °C during the day. Switch off or dim the light, and keep water available at all times.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species comes from humid forest, and a humidity of 60-80 % is suitable. The enclosure must be well ventilated. Keep the substrate slightly moist but never wet, and mist the enclosure lightly once a day. A light misting also stimulates the animal to hunt.

A hide with moist sphagnum helps with shedding, especially if shed skin sticks to toes and tail. The water dish is shallow and wide and is filled so that a little water runs out onto the substrate, which also helps with shedding. Change the water every day.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

The animal is most active at dusk and at night and lives on the forest floor, but benefits from weak UVB. Use a T5 tube intended for forest species, place it over the basking spot at one end, and keep the UV index beneath the lamp at about 2-3 (Ferguson zone 2), so that the animal can choose between light and shade itself. There must be no glass or plastic between the lamp and the animal. Replace the tube every 6-12 months, because the output declines even though the light looks unchanged.

Provide a clear day and night with about 12 hours of light. Animals without UVB can develop bone changes from lack of calcium and vitamin D, so UVB is recommended.

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

FEEDING

In the wild *Cyclodomorphus gerrardii* lives almost exclusively on snails and slugs, and the large, flat teeth at the back of the mouth are used to crush snail shells. Snails are therefore the biggest challenge in husbandry. Use snails from your own culture, frozen edible snails or farmed feeder animals instead of wild snails, which can carry parasites and poison. Snails from areas with slug pellets or poisonous plants such as oleander can kill the animal.

Most animals also take other food: earthworms, wax moth larvae, mealworms, pinkie mice and chicken meat, as well as banana and mango. A pelleted omnivore mix for zoological institutions, soaked in water and mixed with a little wet dog food (3:1), is readily taken and can be a staple, but the diet should be varied as much as possible.

Young are fed every day and adults every other day, with 4-10 snails per feeding depending on the size of the animal. Dust the food with calcium with D3 and a multivitamin every second to third feeding, because snails without shells do not provide enough calcium. Feed in the evening, as the animal is active at dusk.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Adults are among the calmest and most docile skinks. They move slowly and are easy to lift. Juveniles are shyer and empty their bowels when handled, so keep handling to a minimum until the animal is used to you. Slide your hand under the animal rather than grabbing from above, and support the whole body and tail. Never grab the tail. Let the animal climb up by itself, and begin with short periods. Wash your hands after handling.

The animal is most active at dusk, and a light misting can make it go hunting. Keep males apart. Fights between adults are serious, and two males must never be put together.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The animals become sexually mature after about two to three years, at the earliest at about 22 months. The male has a larger head, a more prominent tail base with distinct hemipenal bulges and is often more distinctly striped. The female has a straight tail and a more rounded underside. The differences are distinct only in adults and require that several animals of the same size can be compared. Juveniles cannot be reliably sexed from the outside. Use a vet if you are in doubt.

MATING

In the wild mating takes place in early spring over about six weeks, and males may fight during that period. A cool period of two to three months in winter with less light increases the chance of mating in the enclosure. Heating and light are slowly raised again over a couple of weeks, and feeding resumes one to two weeks later. About one to two weeks after that, the female is placed with the male under supervision. The female may bite the male and try to escape at first, and if she is too rough, the animals must be separated and tried again after a few days. The male grips the female at the shoulder or head, and the mating itself lasts a couple of minutes.

Some males are not interested, and some females do not become pregnant despite mating. More animals of both sexes increase the likelihood of success.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species is live-bearing. Gestation lasts three to four months and depends on temperature. In the wild the young are born in early summer. The female basks a lot during the period and needs a basking spot where the temperature reaches 36-37 °C. About a week before birth she eats less or not at all.

Most litters are 10-30 young, but litters range from about 5 to 67. The young are born one at a time, several minutes apart, and each young is curled up in a membrane, which it eats right after birth. The whole birth takes from twenty minutes to over an hour, depending on litter size. The female may eat unfertilised eggs afterwards.

INCUBATION

There are no eggs to incubate. Gestation lasts about 90-120 days. Cool temperatures prolong it, and temperatures that are too cold or too hot can cause malformations and stillborn young. The female needs the same temperatures as usual with a warm basking spot, and she must be kept alone in the enclosure. Move the young to separate enclosures as soon as possible after birth.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are independent from birth and immediately begin searching for snails. They are pale grey with heavy black crossbands and have a blue tongue and mouth, and they acquire the adult colours over about three months. The young are shy at first and should live separately to avoid stress and aggression, with a basking spot, slightly moist substrate, hides and the same furnishing as the adults. Give the same kind of food as the adults in smaller portions every day, and dust with calcium.

Health and common mistakes

Most problems are caused by care. The typical ones are:

- Metabolic bone disease from a lack of calcium, vitamin D or UVB, especially because shell-less snails do not provide enough calcium. It causes soft jaws and crooked legs.
- Poisoning and parasites from wild snails. Snails from places with slug bait or poisonous plants can kill the animal.
- Shedding difficulties if the humidity is too low.
- Skin infections and respiratory infections from a constantly wet substrate or too low a temperature.
- Overweight and fatty liver from food that is too fatty.
- Intestinal worms in wild-caught animals. New animals must be quarantined.

See a vet with reptile experience if the animal loses weight, stops eating, breathes with its mouth open or seems limp.

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.