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SKINKS

Pygmy Spiny-tailed Skink

Egernia depressa

A small, heavily spined skink from southern Western Australia that lives in family groups and wedges itself into crevices and hollow logs. *Egernia depressa* is omnivorous and gives birth to live young. Little is known about its care, so this guide draws on the species in the wild and on the close relatives *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia hosmeri*.

Family: Scincidae Former name: *Silubosaurus depressus*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**11-13 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**10-25 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**80 × 50 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**27-32 °C**
Basking spot	**40-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-24 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, fruit and plants**
Kept	**In pairs or in groups**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Litter size	**1-6 young**
Gestation	**90-120 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix III**
EU annex	**Annex C**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

About the species

Egernia depressa is one of the smallest species in the genus, averaging about 12 cm snout-vent length, plus the short tail. The body is flattened, and the tail is broad and flat with long, backward-curving spines. The dorsal scales have three keels, the middle one being a long spine about twice the length of the other two. The spines are often worn down against rocks and wood. The belly is smooth. The head is brown with black edging, the forebody light brown and the hindbody brownish grey with irregular, dark crossbands, which often have a white edge.

The species belongs to the Australian *Egernia* group, in which several species live in family groups, and it is partly social itself. When threatened, it retreats into a crevice, inflates its body and blocks the opening with its spiny tail. The name *depressa* is Latin for flattened and refers to the shape of the body.

In 2011 the species was split, and the populations in the Pilbara and central Australia are now regarded as the separate species *Egernia cygnitos*, *Egernia epsisolus* and *Egernia eos*. Older information on *E. depressa* may therefore refer to them.

Lifespan, weight and sexual maturity are not documented for the species; the lifespan of 10-25 years in the specifications is borrowed from *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia hosmeri*, which are far better known in captivity.

Distribution and habitat

Egernia depressa occurs only in Western Australia: from about 100 km west of Kalgoorlie westwards to Wongan Hills, northwards to the area south of North West Cape and north-eastwards to near Newman, but not on the Pilbara plateau itself. Older records from Perth and Albany are due to animals carried there with transport. Records from the Northern Territory and South Australia belong to the species that have been split off. The species is not threatened.

Australia does not permit the export of wild reptiles, so all animals in legal trade outside Australia are captive-bred.

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

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

E. depressa prefers open woodland, especially mulga scrub with acacias, where it hides in dead trees and fallen logs. Where there are granite outcrops in the woodland, it also lives in the crevices there, and it uses termite mounds as well. The animals live in small family groups and retreat into the crevices when danger threatens.

The diet consists of insects as well as flowers, fruit, shoots and leaves from the local vegetation. The climate is dry and warm with cool nights.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little documented knowledge exists on the care of *Egernia depressa*. The recommendations draw on the climate of its range, on the species in the wild and on the close relatives *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia hosmeri*, which have the same requirements for light, heat and furnishing. Figures are borrowed from them unless stated otherwise.

Egernia depressa is smaller than both relatives and about the size of *Egernia striolata*: a pair needs at least 80 × 50 × 60 cm (length × width × height), and larger is better. The substrate can be a mix of soil and sand at least 10 cm deep, so the animals can dig.

Build hides and narrow crevices from flat stones, slate, cork tubes and hollow branches directly on the floor of the enclosure, so they cannot be undermined. The crevices must be narrow enough for the animal to squeeze in and feel its body against both sides. Provide at least two hides, a flat basking stone and a shallow water dish. The enclosure must be well ventilated and have a tight, escape-proof lid.

TEMPERATURE

By day the air should be 27-32 °C with a clear gradient from the cool end to the warm end. Under a halogen spot lies a flat stone whose surface should reach 40-45 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer. At night the temperature may fall to 18-24 °C.

The figures are borrowed from *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia hosmeri* and suit a dry climate with warm days. Whether a winter rest is necessary is not documented.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be 30-50 %. Keep the enclosure mostly dry, but keep the substrate slightly damp under one hide in the cool end, so the animal can choose. A shallow dish of fresh water should always be available. Change the water daily and wash the dish weekly.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

Egernia depressa is diurnal and needs UVB for as long as the light is on. A UVB tube in a reflector over the basking area, covering about half the length of the enclosure, gives Ferguson Zone 3. The zone is borrowed from *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia hosmeri*. Position the basking area so that the animal's back is at least 20 cm from the tube; the distance depends on the strength of the tube. UVB does not pass through glass or plastic, and tubes should be replaced according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Supplement with bright, white daylight for about 12-14 hours a day.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Egernia depressa is omnivorous. In the wild its diet consists of insects, flowers, fruit, shoots and leaves. Offer insects such as crickets, cockroaches, locusts and mealworms together with chopped greens and wild plants such as dandelion and clover, flowers and a little fruit as a treat. Wash all greens and wild plants before offering them.

Juveniles are fed daily with small insects, adults three times a week in small portions, alternating animal food and greens. Dust the food lightly with calcium, and give a vitamin supplement once a week. A diet high in fat leads to obesity.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is a small, shy skink that lives in small family groups in the wild. Keep *Egernia depressa* in pairs or a small group in a spacious enclosure with plenty of hides, and add new animals only after quarantine and under supervision. Separate the animals if they fight.

The animals are not suited to handling. Calm behaviour and fixed routines reduce stress.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The sexes are difficult to tell apart externally, and reliable sexing requires a vet with experience of reptiles. Age and size at sexual maturity are not documented.

MATING

The course of mating and any winter rest before mating are not documented for *Egernia depressa* in captivity. In the close relatives, mating takes place after a cooler period with shorter days, and the male pursues the female and holds on to her during mating. If a pair is kept together, there must be enough hides for the female to withdraw, and the animals should be separated if the male is too persistent.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species gives birth to live young. Litter size and the frequency of litters are not documented for the species; the 1-6 young in the specifications are borrowed from the equally small *Egernia striolata*. The young are born fully developed, but they need hides where the adults cannot chase them.

INCUBATION

There are no eggs to incubate. The length of gestation is not documented for the species; the 3-4 months in the specifications are borrowed from *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia hosmeri*. Give the pregnant female extra food, calcium and UVB, and keep the enclosure quiet. There must be flat hides and narrow crevices where she can give birth.

REARING THE YOUNG

Give the young an enclosure with hides, UVB and small insects and finely chopped greens daily, dusted with calcium. Keep the young under supervision, and separate them from the adults if aggression is seen. Growth and weight gain are not documented.

Health and common mistakes

Egernia depressa is hardy when temperature, light and substrate are right. The typical problems are:

- Calcium deficiency and metabolic bone disease from too little UVB and a one-sided diet.
- Obesity from too much fatty food and too little exercise.
- Skin fungus: a fungus of the genus *Nannizziopsis* has been found in wild-caught animals with crusty skin lesions and emaciation after poor transport and storage. Crusts on the skin require a vet.
- Internal and external parasites, especially in new animals.
- Fighting injuries and stress from overcrowded or unsettled housing.

Quarantine new animals for at least a month before they are housed with others. The animals hide illness well, so contact a vet with experience of reptiles if there is a change in appetite, weight loss or skin changes.

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.