herpy

SKINKS

Hosmer's Spiny-tailed Skink

Egernia hosmeri

Egernia hosmeri is a reddish-brown, spiny skink from the dry, rocky regions of northern Australia. It is diurnal, omnivorous and gives birth to live young. Little documented knowledge of its care exists, so the guide is based on the species in the wild and on the close relatives *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia cunninghami*.

Family: Scincidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**28-30 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**125-135 g**
Lifespan	**10-25 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Savanna and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 60 × 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	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Litter size	**1-8 young**
Gestation	**90-150 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Egernia hosmeri is a sturdy, compact skink with short legs. The upper side is reddish brown with scattered, darker and paler spots on the back, legs and tail. Head and neck are darker brown, the belly is white, and under the chin sit a few dark brown spots. Adults measure about 18 cm from snout to vent, and the rounded, tapering tail is about 60 % as long as the body, so the total length is about 29 cm. Adults weigh about 125-135 g. Lifespan is not documented, but the species lives for at least eight years in captivity, and 10-25 years in the box corresponds to *Egernia stokesii*.

The tail is flatter and spinier than in the nearest relative, *Egernia cunninghami*. The species is live-bearing. The sexes look alike, so reliable sexing requires a vet who can examine the vent with an endoscope.

Distribution and habitat

Egernia hosmeri occurs in the dry, rocky regions of Queensland and the Northern Territory in northern Australia: from the Einasleigh Uplands in the east across the plains south of the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Mount Isa region to the highlands at the Gulf Fall in the Northern Territory. The type locality is Kaban in Queensland. The species occurs only in Australia and is not threatened.

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

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

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

The species lives on rock outcrops and in low, open woodland and tussock grassland, where crevices between rocks and stones provide cover. It is diurnal and lives on the ground and on the rocks. Its food is insects, leaves, shoots and berries.

The climate in the area is warm, with a rainy season in summer. Annual rhythm, social life and breeding season in the wild are not documented.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little documented knowledge exists about the care of *Egernia hosmeri*. The recommendations are based on the climate and habitat, on the species in the wild and on the close relatives *Egernia stokesii*, *Egernia cunninghami* and *Egernia striolata*, which have the same requirements for light, heat and furnishing. The figures are borrowed from them where nothing else is stated.

Egernia hosmeri is about as large as *Egernia stokesii*, and the dimensions are borrowed from there: a pair needs at least 120 × 60 × 60 cm (length × width × height), and bigger is better. A single animal can be kept in somewhat less, but the floor area should not be under 90 × 45 cm.

The substrate can be a mixture of soil, sand and coconut fibre in a layer of at least 10 cm; avoid fine sand alone, because it can cause eye irritation and intestinal impaction. Build crevices and caves of flat stones, slate and cork directly on the floor, so that they cannot be undermined. There must be at least two hides, a large, flat basking stone and a stable water dish. The enclosure must be well ventilated and have a tight, escape-proof lid.

TEMPERATURE

The enclosure must have a clear gradient. By day the air is 27-32 °C. Under a halogen spot lies a large, flat stone whose surface should reach 40-45 °C measured with an infrared thermometer, and the cool end is about 27 °C. At night the temperature may fall to 18-24 °C.

The figures are borrowed from *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia cunninghami* and suit a species from a warm, dry, rocky country. Ceramic heaters and heat mats are not enough as the only heat source. Whether the species needs a cooler winter period in captivity is not documented.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species comes from dry regions, and humidity should be 30-50 %. Mist the enclosure lightly a couple of times a week, and keep the substrate slightly damp under one hide at the cool end, so that the animal can choose for itself. There must always be a stable, shallow dish of fresh water. Change the water daily, and wash the dish every week.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

Egernia hosmeri is diurnal and needs UVB for as long as the light is on. A UVB tube in a reflector over the basking spot, covering about half the enclosure's length, gives Ferguson zone 3. The zone is borrowed from *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia cunninghami*. Position the basking spot 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 penetrate glass or plastic, and the tubes are replaced according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Supplement with strong, white daylight. The photoperiod is about 12-14 hours.

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

FEEDING

Egernia hosmeri is omnivorous and in the wild eats insects, leaves, shoots and berries. Give greens and wild herbs such as dandelion, clover and endive, chopped vegetables such as courgette and sweet potato, flowers and a little fruit as a treat. In addition come insects such as cockroaches, crickets, grasshoppers and mealworms as well as snails. Wash all greens and wild

herbs before they are given.

Young animals are fed daily with more insects, adults about three times a week in small portions, alternating between greens and animal food. Dust insects and greens lightly with calcium, and give a vitamin supplement once a week. A diet high in fat causes obesity.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The animals' social life is not documented for *Egernia hosmeri*. The species of the genus live in permanent pairs and stable family groups for years, but unfamiliar adults can come into serious conflict. Therefore keep the species singly or in pairs, and add new animals only after quarantine and under supervision. Separate the animals if they fight.

The animals are shy and not suited to much handling, but become more confident when fed from tweezers. Calm behaviour and fixed routines reduce stress.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The sexes look alike, and reliable sexing requires a vet who can examine the vent with an endoscope. Females have a vertical fold in the middle of the cloacal chamber, which males do not have. Age at sexual maturity is not documented.

MATING

The course of mating and any winter rest before mating are not documented. In captivity the mating season is probably in December. A settled pair that has lived together for a long time is the safest starting point for breeding, because the species of the genus form permanent pairs.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species gives birth to live young, on average four in a litter. The range of 1-8 young in the box is borrowed from *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia cunninghami*. How often the female gives birth is not documented; the relatives have one litter a year. Give the female broad, flat hides where she can give birth.

INCUBATION

There are no eggs to incubate. The length of gestation is not documented for *Egernia hosmeri*. In the relatives it lasts about three months (*Egernia stokesii*, *Egernia cunninghami*) and up to five months (*Egernia kingii*), and the box's 90-150 days are borrowed from there. Give the pregnant female extra food, calcium and UVB, and keep the enclosure calm.

REARING THE YOUNG

The size of the young at birth is not documented. Give them an enclosure with many hiding places, 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.

Health and common mistakes

Egernia hosmeri 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 little exercise.
- Fungal infection on the belly and feet from a persistently damp substrate.
- Internal and external parasites, especially in new animals.
- Fight injuries and stress from keeping animals too close together or in a disturbed setting.

Quarantine new animals for at least a month before they come together with others. The animals hide illness well, so contact a vet with reptile experience in case of changed appetite, weight loss or swellings.

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.

The full guide with map and updates: herpy.org/en/skinks/egernia-hosmeri