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SKINKS

King's Skink

Egernia kingii

A large, heavy and almost black skink from the south-west coast of Australia. *Egernia kingii* is omnivorous, gives birth to live young and lives a long time. Little documented knowledge exists on its care in the terrarium, so this guide is based on the species in the wild and on its close relatives *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia cunninghami*.

Family: Scincidae Former name: *Tiliqua kingii*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**55 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**220-360 g**
Lifespan	**20 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial**
Habitat	**Temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**150 × 60 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**25-32 °C**
Basking spot	**38-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**14-20 °C**
Humidity	**40-60%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, fruit, plants and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Sexually mature	**36-60 months**
Litter size	**2-8 young**
Gestation	**140-154 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Egernia kingii is a large, sturdily built skink. The body and tail are black or dark grey, often with small whitish spots or short streaks, and the dorsal scales are keeled. The upper lip is dark, and there are no broad, pale longitudinal stripes. Adults reach 24 cm from snout to vent and a total length of up to about 55 cm, and weigh 220-360 g. The tail can be shed, and an adult retains the ability throughout its life.

The species belongs to the Australian *Egernia* group of large skinks, several of which live in family groups. The young are slender at birth and weigh about 7 g. The species does not mature sexually until 3-5 years of age and probably lives to about 20 years. It is related to *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia cunninghami*, which are better known in captivity.

Distribution and habitat

Egernia kingii occurs only in south-western Western Australia, in coastal areas. It is common on Rottnest Island and Penguin Island and on the coast in open woodland and open heath. The species is not threatened.

Australia does not permit the export of wild reptiles, so all animals in the trade outside Australia come from captive breeding.

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

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

The habitat is the coastal landscape of the south-west: open woodland, open heath and coastal scrub with a temperate, Mediterranean-type climate with hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters.

The diet is mainly soft plant material from the local vegetation, supplemented with insects and birds' eggs. The species is itself prey for many predators, including tiger snakes (*Notechis*). The young often die, and growth to adult size is slow, so the adults live a long time.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

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

Egernia kingii is larger than both relatives, so the size is scaled up relative to theirs: a pair needs at least 150 × 60 × 60 cm (length × width × height), and larger is better. The substrate can be a mix of soil, coconut fibre and bark in a layer of at least 10 cm; avoid fine sand alone, because it can cause eye irritation and intestinal impaction.

Build hiding places and crevices of flat stones, slate and cork directly on the bottom so they cannot be undermined. There must be at least two hides, a large, flat basking stone and a large, stable water dish that the animal can bathe in. The enclosure must be well ventilated and have a tight, escape-proof lid.

TEMPERATURE

By day the air should be 25-32 °C with a clear gradient from the cool to the warm end. Under a halogen spot lies a large, flat stone whose surface should reach 38-45 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer. At night the temperature may fall to 14-20 °C.

The figures are borrowed from *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia cunninghami* and suit a temperate coastal climate. In the wild the species has a cool winter; shorter days and slightly lower temperatures in winter follow its rhythm. Whether a proper winter rest is necessary in captivity is not documented.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be 40-60%. Mist the enclosure lightly a couple of times a week, and keep the substrate slightly damp under one hide at the cool end, so the animal can choose. A large dish of fresh water should always be available. Change the water daily, and wash the dish every week.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

Egernia kingii 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 length of the enclosure, 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 tubes are replaced according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Supplement with strong, white daylight. The light period is about 14 hours in summer and 12 hours in winter.

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

FEEDING

Egernia kingii is omnivorous. In the wild the diet is mostly soft plant material, supplemented with insects and birds' eggs. Give adult animals a large proportion of greens and wild plants such as dandelion, clover, endive and cabbage, 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. Small amounts of cooked egg or lean meat can be included, but should not make up much. Wash all greens and wild plants before offering them.

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

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is a large and powerful skink. The animals' social life is not documented in the same way as in *Egernia stokesii* and *Egernia cunninghami*, which live in family groups. Therefore keep *Egernia kingii* in pairs or singly, and add new animals only after quarantine and under supervision. Separate the animals if they fight.

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

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The sexes are hard to tell apart externally, and reliable sexing requires a vet experienced in reptiles. The species grows slowly and becomes sexually mature after 3-5 years.

MATING

The course of mating and any winter rest before mating are not documented for animals in captivity. A cooler period with shorter days in winter corresponds to the natural rhythm.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species gives birth to live young. A litter is 2-8 young, which weigh about 7 g each. How often the female gives birth is not documented. The young are born fully developed and fend for themselves from the first day, but they need hiding places where the adults cannot chase them.

INCUBATION

There are no eggs to incubate. Gestation lasts 20-22 weeks. Give the pregnant female extra food, calcium and UVB, and keep the enclosure quiet. There must be broad, flat hiding places where she can give birth.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young weigh about 7 g at birth and measure 6-8 cm from snout to vent. Give them an enclosure with 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. Mortality is high in the wild, and growth is slow.

Health and common mistakes

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

- Calcium deficiency and brittle bones from too little UVB and a one-sided diet.
- Obesity from too much fatty food and little exercise.
- Fungal infection of the belly and feet from a persistently damp substrate.
- Internal and external parasites, especially in new animals.
- Fight injuries and stress from overcrowding or disturbance.

Quarantine new animals for at least a month before they are put together with others. The animals hide illness well, so contact a vet experienced in reptiles if there is a change in appetite, weight loss or swellings.

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.