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SKINKS

Algerian orange-tailed skink

Eumeces algeriensis

A large, sturdy skink from Morocco and Algeria with a brown ground colour and pale crossbands with reddish eyespots. *Eumeces algeriensis* burrows into dry soil, needs sun, UVB and a deep substrate, and is often confused with *Eumeces schneiderii*.

Family: Scincidae Former name: *Eumeces schneideri algeriensis; Novoeumeces algeriensis*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**30-45 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**15-20 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 60 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**24-30 °C**
Basking spot	**38-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**21-24 °C**
Humidity	**20-40%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, plants and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**5-15 eggs**
Incubation	**40-60 days** at 28-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Eumeces algeriensis is a large, sturdily built skink with smooth, glossy scales, a short, triangular head, short legs and a long tail. The ground colour is brown to ochre, with irregular pale crossbands alternating with bands bearing reddish eyespots. There are no longitudinal stripes. Adults are 30-45 cm long including the tail, and slightly larger and heavier in build than *E. schneiderii*.

The species was formerly regarded as a subspecies of *Eumeces schneiderii* and has also been placed in the genus *Novoeumeces*. It is now treated as a separate species with two subspecies, *E. a. algeriensis* and *E. a. meridionalis*; whether the latter is a valid form is unresolved. The two species are often confused in the trade. *E. algeriensis* has crossbands, not longitudinal stripes.

The skink is diurnal, digs a great deal and is less sociable than *E. schneiderii*. It basks willingly at high temperatures and afterwards withdraws into the substrate or under a stone.

Distribution and habitat

Eumeces algeriensis occurs in Morocco and Algeria, below 1,700 m above sea level. The subspecies *E. a. meridionalis* belongs in eastern Morocco and north-western Algeria. The species is native to the Maghreb in North Africa and also occurs in the Spanish exclave of Melilla on the Mediterranean coast of Morocco.

> **Native range:** Morocco and Algeria.

HABITAT

The species lives in a mixture of habitats in the Maghreb: Mediterranean scrub, open woodland, grassland, sandy coasts, farmland and gardens. The terrain is often stony, with hard, compacted ground and patches of sand. The animals burrow under stones, which keeps them cool during the hottest hours of the summer.

They are diurnal, bask and forage during the warm hours of the day, and withdraw into burrows they have dug when it becomes too hot or too cold.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Eumeces algeriensis lives on the ground and burrows, so floor area and substrate matter most. Two animals need at least 120 × 60 × 45 cm (length × width × height); a single animal can be kept in 90 × 45 × 40 cm. The figures are borrowed from *Eumeces schneiderii*, which has the same requirements.

The substrate should be deep, 10-15 cm, and loose: a mixture of coconut fibre, peat or orchid bark with no more than 30 % sand. More sand carries a risk of impaction. Place flat slabs of stone directly on the floor of the enclosure before adding the substrate, so that the animal cannot undermine them. Provide a low, wide hide of heavy ceramic with a small entrance. The skink is a poor climber, so branches should be large pieces of driftwood resting on the floor, and raised surfaces should be avoided, because the animal may fall and injure itself. Any plants should be succulents in pots.

The enclosure must be completely escape-proof.

TEMPERATURE

The enclosure needs a clear gradient. By day the temperature should be 24-30 °C, coolest at one end and warmest near the basking spot. Under a halogen spot the basking spot should reach 38-45 °C, measured on the surface with an infrared thermometer. The species basks willingly at high temperatures, but must always be able to retreat into the substrate.

At night the heat is switched off, and the temperature may fall to 21-24 °C, but never below 21 °C. Control all heat sources with a thermostat. The enclosure must not stand in direct sunlight, because the temperature can then quickly exceed 40 °C and kill the animal.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species comes from dry regions and must be kept dry: the humidity should stay below 40 %. Mist lightly once a day if the air is very dry, and twice a day when a shed is approaching and the skin looks dull. A few spots may be kept moist to help during shedding.

Provide fresh water in a shallow dish that the animal can climb out of, and change the water daily. The animal bathes often and soon fouls the water.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal and needs UVB for as long as the light is on. It is placed in Ferguson zone 3; the figure is borrowed from *Eumeces schneiderii*. A T5 tube in a reflector above the basking spot provides the UVB and must be replaced according to the manufacturer's instructions.

The photoperiod is about 12 hours a day in the summer months and about 10 hours in winter, with darkness at night.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Eumeces algeriensis is omnivorous but feeds mainly on insects: crickets, cockroaches, mealworms, silkworms, waxworms and hornworms, as well as snails and earthworms. The animal is not fast and does not always catch hopping prey, so feed from a dish or tongs. Pinkie mice are offered only as an occasional treat, because they are fatty and the animal easily becomes overweight.

Adults are fed every second day. Offer greens twice a week, for example kale, cabbage leaves and carrot, although some animals will not take them. Dust the food with calcium at every feeding and with a vitamin supplement once a week. Young animals need supplements most.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is less sociable than *E. schneiderii*. It can be kept singly, as a pair or as two females, but never two males together. The enclosure needs several hides and basking spots.

New animals are often wary. Lift the animal from below and never grab it from above; a bite can hurt. Quarantine new animals for at least 30 days. The animal digs a great deal and is often seen only in the morning and at feeding.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The age at sexual maturity is not documented for the species. Males are more powerfully built and have a broader head than females, but the difference is clear only in adults.

MATING

Mating is not documented for the species, and captive breeding is rare. In the close relative *Eumeces schneiderii*, mating takes place in spring after a cool period, and the female is placed with the male for one to two weeks as long as there is no aggression.

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

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species lays eggs. Clutch size is not documented; *Eumeces schneiderii* lays 5-15 eggs, and the figure in the specification box is borrowed from it. Give the female a nest box at the warm end with a deep, moist layer of sand and vermiculite so that she does not retain the eggs. The number of clutches per year is not documented.

INCUBATION

Move the eggs carefully to an incubation box with moist vermiculite and do not turn them. At 28-30 °C they hatch after about 40-60 days; the figures are borrowed from *Eumeces schneiderii* and are not documented for the species itself. Temperature-dependent sex determination is not documented.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

Keep the hatchlings in a small enclosure with a loose, slightly moist substrate, a basking spot and UVB. Give small insects daily, dusted with calcium, and keep them apart if they bite one another. Size at hatching and growth are not documented for the species.

Health and common mistakes

Eumeces algeriensis is hardy when temperature, light and substrate are right. The typical problems are:

- Poor appetite and emaciation, most often because of too low a temperature or a weak heat bulb.
- Calcium deficiency and brittle bones from too little UVB and a one-sided diet.
- Constipation if the animal swallows sand along with its prey; a substrate with no more than 30 % sand and food offered in a dish reduce the risk.
- Problems with sheds, toes and ears if the air is too dry during shedding.

- Overheating if the enclosure stands in direct sunlight or lacks a cool spot.
- Obesity from too much fatty food.

Quarantine new animals for at least 30 days. Contact a vet with reptile experience if appetite changes, or in the case of 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.