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SKINKS

Gold skink

Eumeces schneiderii

A sturdy, smooth and fast skink from the arid regions between North Africa and Central Asia. *Eumeces schneiderii* is sand-coloured to olive-brown with orange spots, readily burrows into loose sand and is a robust, long-lived terrarium species when given sun, UVB and a deep substrate.

Family: Scincidae English name: Gold Skink Former name: *Eumeces schneideri; Novoeumeces schneideri*

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	**Desert and semi-desert**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**120 × 60 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**25-30 °C**
Basking spot	**40-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-25 °C**
Humidity	**20-40%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, fruit and vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly or one male with several females**

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 schneiderii is a large, heavily built skink with smooth, glossy scales, a short, triangular head, short legs and a long tail. The colour is silvery grey to olive-brown above with orange or yellow spots on the back and tail and often a pale to orange stripe along the flanks, while the underside is pale. Males have a distinctly broader head than females. The legs are short and sturdy, and the body is built for moving through loose soil and sand.

Adults are 30-45 cm long including the tail. The body from snout to vent reaches up to 19 cm, and adults weigh on average just under 60 g. Animals from regions with a mild Mediterranean climate grow larger than animals from regions with a continental climate. The species varies a great deal between regions, and four subspecies are distinguished: *E. s. schneiderii*, *E. s. pavimentatus*, *E. s. princeps* and *E. s. barani*. The systematics are not finally settled. The species has also been listed under the spelling *E. schneideri* and for a time in the genus *Novoeumeces*. In the trade it is confused with the north-west African *Eumeces algeriensis*, which was formerly regarded as a subspecies.

The animal is diurnal and alert. It hides a lot in the sand, but comes out to bask and eat, and a healthy animal is fast and readily flees. New animals are often nervous and may bite, but hissing and gaping soon subside, and most get used to gentle handling.

Distribution and habitat

Eumeces schneiderii has a very large range from North Africa to Central Asia: Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt (including Sinai), on through Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Cyprus to Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran. To the north-east the species occurs in the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Dagestan in Russia) and in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as far as Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The subspecies each have their own area. *E. s. pavimentatus* belongs in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, *E. s. princeps* in the Caucasus and Iran, and *E. s. barani* was described from Anatolia in Turkey. The type locality of the species is regarded as Cyprus.

> **Native range:** Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Cyprus, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

HABITAT

The species lives in arid to semi-arid areas with loose or stony soil and scattered to moderate plant cover: scrub, stony steppes, desert margins, farmland and rocky areas. The soil is often loose enough for the animal to burrow and lie hidden during the hottest hours of the day and at night.

The climate is hot and dry with large differences between day and night. The animals are diurnal, bask during the morning, hunt insects and other small animals on the ground and seek shelter among stones and in self-dug burrows when it is too hot or too cold. Active animals have a body temperature of about 33 °C. In large parts of the range, especially in the Caucasus and Central Asia, the winters are cold, and the animals then lie inactive in the ground.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Eumeces schneiderii lives on the ground and burrows, so floor area and substrate are the most important things. A pair, or a male with two females, needs at least 120 × 60 × 45 cm (length × width × height). A single animal under 35 cm can be kept in 90 × 45 × 40 cm, but larger is better, because the animal is active and explores its enclosure.

The substrate must be loose, dry sand or sandy soil in a layer of at least 8-10 cm, so that the animal can burrow completely. Choose round-grained sand, not sharp quartz sand. Droppings are removed daily, and the substrate is replaced completely every two to three months. Lay out flat stones, slate stacks, hollows and branches, so that there are several hides and a basking spot. The stones must stand directly on the floor of the enclosure, so that they cannot be undermined and topple.

The enclosure needs a tight-fitting lid, because the species is good at finding gaps. Preferably cover three of the sides, so that the animal feels secure.

Read more: Heat and temperature

TEMPERATURE

The enclosure needs a clear gradient. By day the enclosure should be 25-30 °C, warmest near the basking spot and coolest at the opposite end. Under a halogen spot the basking spot should reach 40-45 °C, measured on the surface with an infrared thermometer.

At night the heat is switched off, and the temperature may fall to 20-25 °C, but not below 18 °C. In winter the animal can be given a cool period with 20-25 °C by day, 10-15 °C at night and shorter days; the duration is not documented. Control the heat bulb with a thermostat, and avoid heat rocks. If the animal does not eat and is thin, the basking spot is often too cold or the bulb old.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species comes from arid regions and should be kept dry with a humidity of 20-40 %, and in any case below 50 %. Light misting once a week is enough.

Provide fresh water in a stable, shallow dish that the animal can climb out of, and change the water daily. The species drinks readily from standing water. A small part of the substrate at the cool end can be kept slightly damp as a hide during shedding, but the rest of the substrate must be dry.

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 belongs to Ferguson zone 3 and needs a UV index of about 3 at the basking spot. A T5 HO tube in a reflector, covering about half the length of the enclosure and mounted above the basking spot together with the heat lamp, provides this. Replace the tube according to the manufacturer's instructions, and measure the UV index if you can.

The photoperiod is 12-14 hours a day in the summer half of the year and shorter in winter. Provide shade and hides at the other end of the enclosure.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Eumeces schneiderii is omnivorous, but eats mainly live insects and other small animals: crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, silkworms, snails and earthworms. Many animals never eat greens, while others take a little fruit or vegetables. Offer a little chopped fruit or vegetables and see whether the animal takes it.

Feed juveniles daily and adults two to three times a week. Give as much as the animal eats in about 5 minutes. Fatty food such as pinkie mice is given only rarely, because the animal easily becomes fat and sluggish. Lightly dust the food with calcium, and give a vitamin supplement once a week. Fast, jumping insects are not always caught, so feed from a dish.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is curious and readily explores its surroundings. New animals are often cautious, but with patience and feeding from tongs they become calm. Lift the animal from below, and never grab it from above; a bite can hurt.

The species can be kept singly, but tolerates a male with one to three females if the enclosure is large and has enough hides and basking spots for all. Two males should not be kept together, because they fight. 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

Males have a broader head and a stronger neck than females, but the difference is only clearly visible in adult animals. In the wild females become sexually mature on average at just under three years. With plenty of food and without a long winter it goes faster in the enclosure, probably 1-2 years.

MATING

Mating takes place in spring after the cool winter period. The female must be in good condition. Put the female in with the male, and leave them together for one to two weeks if there is no aggression. The course of mating is not documented for the species.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species lays eggs. A clutch is 5-15 eggs; the figure is uncertain. The female lays the eggs about four to six weeks after mating in a deep, damp layer of sand and vermiculite, in which she digs. Give her a laying box at the warm end so that she does not retain the eggs. The number of clutches per year is not documented.

INCUBATION

The eggs are carefully moved to an incubation box with damp vermiculite and are not turned. At 28-30 °C they hatch after about 40-60 days. Temperature-dependent sex determination has not been documented in the species.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are about 5 cm from snout to vent and weigh just over 3 g when they hatch. Keep them in a small enclosure with a firm, slightly damp sand substrate, a basking spot and UVB. Give small insects daily, dusted with calcium, and keep them separate if they bite each other. Growth in captivity is not documented.

Health and common mistakes

Eumeces schneiderii 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 together with its prey; fine, round-grained sand and feeding from a dish reduce the risk.
- Internal and external parasites, especially in wild-caught animals.
- Obesity from too much fatty food.
- Egg binding if the female has nowhere to lay.

Quarantine new animals for at least 30 days. Contact a vet experienced in reptiles if appetite changes, or in the case of weight loss or swellings.

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.