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SKINKS

Emerald Skink

Lamprolepis smaragdina

Lamprolepis smaragdina is a slender, diurnal skink that lives in the trees on the islands of South-East Asia and the western Pacific. It is usually emerald green with brown, white-speckled hind legs and spends most of its time on trunks and branches. In the enclosure it needs height, warmth, powerful UVB and high humidity, and it is best suited as a display animal.

Family: Scincidae Former name: *Dasia smaragdina; Lygosoma smaragdinum*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**20-25 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**7-12 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Rainforest**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**60 × 45 × 90 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-29 °C**
Basking spot	**33-36 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-25 °C**
Humidity	**70-100%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects, fruit and complete diet**
Kept	**Singly or in groups**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**9-13 months**
Clutch size	**1-2 eggs**
Incubation	**69-100 days** at 26-29 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Lamprolepis smaragdina is a slender skink with a pointed head, long toes and smooth, rounded scales. The ground colour is shining green, often with brown hind legs spotted with white, and yellow eyelids around the black eyes. The colour varies a great deal: some animals are black-spotted, partly brown or entirely brown, and on a few islands almost blue animals are found. The underside is paler. The tail is up to one and a half times as long as the body and can be shed if the animal is grabbed.

The species reaches 20-25 cm including the tail, and the body from snout to vent is up to 12 cm. The males are territorial and defend an area with several females. Both when defending the territory and when courting, the males bob their heads.

The name smaragdina means emerald green in Latin and refers to the colour. The genus name *Lamprolepis* probably comes from the Greek word for shining and the word for scale, and that fits the smooth, glossy scales. *L. smaragdina* is easy to recognise, but it is divided into several subspecies and local forms, which go by the same name in the trade. The most distinct populations live on Sulawesi. The species is shy and fast and is best as an animal to watch, not an animal to handle.

Distribution and habitat

Lamprolepis smaragdina has a very large range. It is found in the Philippines, large parts of Indonesia (from Lombok and Sulawesi to the Moluccas and New Guinea), Timor-Leste, the Bismarck Archipelago and the Admiralty Islands, the Solomon Islands (including the Santa Cruz Islands) and on beyond Palau and the Carolines in Micronesia to the Marshall Islands. The species has spread across the sea to even very small islands, and the populations on the remote Pacific islands are the youngest. On Saipan in the Northern Marianas it has been introduced.

> **Native range:** Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Palau and Timor-Leste.

HABITAT

Lamprolepis smaragdina is tied to trees. It is found in forest with an open canopy in the lowlands, in mangroves, in coconut plantations and in trees in gardens and parks, and it spends almost its whole life on trunks and branches. The species prefers bare trunks without climbers and is common in disturbed, coastal landscape, often in palm plantations.

The climate is tropical with warm, humid days and nights. By day the animal basks on pale trunks and branches and maintains a body temperature of about 30 °C while hunting insects in foliage and on bark. The food is mostly arthropods, occasionally small geckos and skinks, and a little fruit.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

A single adult *Lamprolepis smaragdina* needs an enclosure of at least 60 × 45 × 90 cm (length × width × height), and larger is better, especially in height. The species is arboreal, so height is more important than floor area. An enclosure with a front opening that is opaque on all sides except the front is calmer for the animal and easier to access. Ventilation must be good so that the air does not become stagnant and musty.

The substrate must above all retain moisture and cushion a fall. Use a layer of 5-10 cm of moist coconut fibre or sphagnum, possibly with a layer of leaves on top, and replace the substrate completely at least once a month if it is not bioactive. A bioactive substrate requires a thicker layer and live plants.

Furnish the enclosure with many branches, cork and vines at all heights so that the animal can climb and regulate its temperature. A sturdy branch under the heat source is the basking spot. Non-toxic tropical plants such as pothos, philodendron and bromeliads give cover and help with humidity. Males and females should only be kept together if breeding is intended.

Read more: Heat and temperature Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation Read more: Terrarium construction and bioactive substrate

TEMPERATURE

The basking spot for *Lamprolepis smaragdina* should be about 35 °C, measured on the branch itself with a digital probe. The cool side should be 24-29 °C, and at night the temperature should be 20-25 °C. The heat source is switched off at night. The warmest zone is at the top under the lamp, and the coolest at the bottom, so there must be climbing material at all heights.

A halogen lamp or a 60 W heat bulb in a lamp with a ceramic fitting is normally enough for one animal; a dimmer or thermostat keeps the basking spot at the right level. If the basking spot is too hot, switch to a weaker bulb, and if it is too cold, a stronger one is required. Ceramic heaters and coloured bulbs are less suitable, because a diurnal skink needs light and radiant heat.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The humidity in the enclosure for *Lamprolepis smaragdina* should be about 70 % by day and rise towards 100 % at night. Mist the enclosure morning and evening, preferably when it is dark, and lightly again in the afternoon if desired. An automatic rain system makes it much easier in such a tall enclosure, and the animal drinks the droplets that sit on leaves and branches.

Measure with a digital hygrometer probe in the middle of the enclosure. Humidity that is too low causes health problems, but so does poor ventilation, so the enclosure must be able to dry out a little between mistings. If a fogger is used, it must run with distilled water and only at night and be cleaned regularly. Also place a shallow bowl of clean water at the feeding spot. Change the water daily, and scrub the bowl every week.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Lamprolepis smaragdina is active by day and lives in sunlit trees, so the species needs powerful UVB and bright light. Use a 6 % T5 tube (Ferguson zone 2) in a reflective fitting covering most of the length of the enclosure, and place the basking spot 20-30 cm below the tube. For low enclosures a compact tube close to the basking spot is preferable. The UV index should be 2-3 at the basking spot. Measure with a UV meter, and replace the tube every 12 months.

UVB is blocked by glass and plastic, so a window provides no UVB. Add a powerful white light of about 6500 K, for example a T5 HO tube or an LED bar, especially if there are live plants. The light should be on 11-13 hours a day and follow the season.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Lamprolepis smaragdina is first and foremost an insectivore, but takes a little fruit and flowers. The basic food can be crickets, cockroaches (for example *Blaptica dubia*), locusts and other varied insects. A small dish of fruit food for arboreal geckos can be offered once a week. Variety is important.

Young animals are fed every day, adults every other day. Give as many insects as the animal eats in five minutes, preferably from tongs with soft tips. The prey must be no larger than slightly smaller than the animal's head. Gut-load the prey with nutritious food for two to three days beforehand. Dust them lightly with a mixture of calcium and multivitamin at each feeding. Drinking water comes from the misting, but a bowl of clean water should always be available.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Lamprolepis smaragdina is fast and shy and better as a display animal than as an animal for handling. A new animal needs at least two weeks in peace. If it does not eat after that time, it should see a vet before it is handled. Accustom it to taking insects from tongs, and let it walk onto a hand or arm by itself if it has to be moved. Never grab it from above, because that is perceived as a predator attack, and the animal can shed its tail.

The species can be kept singly or in groups in a correspondingly larger enclosure. Males are territorial and must not be kept with other males. If the animals do not have enough space to get out of each other's way, conflicts arise.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Lamprolepis smaragdina becomes sexually mature after 9-13 months. Sex differences are small: the males are territorial and can be recognised by behaviour, and a mature male is usually more powerfully built than the female. Reliable sexing requires a vet with reptile experience.

MATING

Breeding of *Lamprolepis smaragdina* in enclosures has been only sparsely described. A male and one or more females are kept together in a large, tall enclosure with many hides and climbing opportunities so that the females can get out of the male's way. The male bobs his head during courtship. Keep the males apart, as they defend territory.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Lamprolepis smaragdina lays eggs, normally 1-2 at a time. The female lays them under loose bark, so the enclosure must have loose cork surfaces and a laying box with moist, loose soil or moss. How many clutches the female lays per year is not documented. Keep an eye on the female's weight and calcium intake during the laying period.

INCUBATION

The eggs hatch after 69-100 days. Remove them carefully without turning them, and place them half buried in moist vermiculite or peat moss in a lightly ventilated container. The temperature is not documented for the species; 26-29 °C suits tropical, arboreal skinks and is an estimate. The moss must be moist, but not wet.

REARING THE YOUNG

The hatchlings resemble the adults in colour and are fed like adults, but in smaller sizes and every day. Give small crickets, springtails and other small insects, and dust the food with calcium and vitamin D3. Keep the hatchlings in a small, tall enclosure with the same temperature, humidity and UVB as the adults. Keep them apart from adult animals if there is not enough space.

Health and common mistakes

Little specific knowledge exists about diseases in the species. Typical problems and prevention:

- Bone loss and weakness with a lack of UVB, calcium and vitamin D3. Use powerful UVB, replace the tube every 12 months, and dust the food with calcium and multivitamin.
- Respiratory and skin problems with stagnant, too humid air without ventilation. Provide good ventilation and a dry period between mistings.
- Dehydration with humidity that is too low. Dull eyes and a limp body are signs of too little moisture.
- Parasites in newly acquired animals, especially wild-caught ones. Quarantine new animals and have a faecal sample examined by a vet with reptile experience.
- Lost tail from fright or incorrect handling. The tail regrows only partly.

A healthy animal is alert, has clear eyes and a firm, rounded body. See a vet if the animal loses weight, does not eat or lies about lethargically.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene 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.