herpy

SKINKS

Southern White's Skink

Liopholis whitii

A medium-sized, diurnal rock skink from cool temperate southern Australia and Tasmania. *Liopholis whitii* lives in rock crevices and burrows under stones, lives in small family groups and gives birth to live young. It needs an enclosure with many narrow hiding places, a warm basking spot, a cool night and patience when putting animals together.

Family: Scincidae Former name: *Egernia whitii; Scincus whitii*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**8-10 cm** snout-vent length
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling and burrowing**
Habitat	**Rocky terrain and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**90 × 45 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**20-26 °C**
Basking spot	**30-35 °C**
Temperature, night	**12-18 °C**
Humidity	**40-60%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects, fruit and plants**
Kept	**In pairs or in groups**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Sexually mature	**24-36 months**
Litter size	**1-4 young**
Clutches per year	**1**
Gestation	**100-140 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Liopholis whitii is a compact, sturdily built skink with a squarish body cross-section, short legs and a thick tail. The pattern varies greatly: the back often has three stripes or bands, the middle one grey, brown or reddish, and the sides have black and white rosettes on a grey to brown ground. The head and tail are usually plain brown. Many animals have a black lip stripe running from a yellow-rimmed eye, while others lack both back and lip markings. The belly is pale peachy orange, deepening towards the tail and the undersides of the limbs.

Adults measure 8-10 cm from snout to vent. Males and females mature at about 8 cm, usually after three years.

It is among the best-studied lizards with family life. The animals live in family groups built around a stable pair and are very aggressive towards strangers, including females. Australia does not permit the export of wild reptiles, so all animals outside the country are captive-bred, and the species is rare in the trade.

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

Distribution and habitat

Liopholis whitii occurs in southern Australia: the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and the islands of Bass Strait. It is common.

In 2026 the species was defined more narrowly. Animals in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, southern Queensland and north-eastern Victoria now belong to *Liopholis compressicauda*, and an isolated population in Mutawintji National Park in arid western New South Wales has been described as *Liopholis mutawintji*. Older records of *L. whitii* from those two areas therefore refer to other species. The species was formerly placed in the genus *Egernia*.

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

The species lives in rocky terrain, forest, scrub and heath, where it shelters in crevices between rocks, under flat slabs of stone and in burrows under timber and roots. It builds burrows with several entrances, the openings well hidden, and these are the animal's permanent home year after year. The animals have an activity season and spend the cold period in their retreats.

The animals live in small family groups, which can consist of a stable pair and several cohorts of young. The young stay with their parents until they are about half grown and are then driven away. In *L. whitii* there is most conflict between siblings and between father and young, and least between mother and young. Adults may eat unfamiliar young and bite off their tails. The food is insects and other small animals, and plants and berries are also eaten. Mating takes place in September and October, and the young are born in late January and in February.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about keeping *Liopholis whitii*. A single animal can be kept in 60 × 30 × 40 cm. The size for a pair, temperature, humidity and lighting are based on the cool temperate climate of the range and on the better-known *Egernia cunninghami* and *Egernia stokesii*. The lifespan of 10-15 years is an estimate.

A pair needs at least 90 × 45 × 45 cm (length × width × height). Use a substrate of sand and soil at least 10 cm deep so the animals can dig, and build hiding places from flat stones and slate slabs resting on the floor of the enclosure so they cannot be undermined. Make narrow crevices of several sizes so an animal can always withdraw. The enclosure needs a tight, escape-proof lid.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

TEMPERATURE

By day the air should be 20-26 °C, and under a lamp at one end a flat stone should reach 30-35 °C measured with an infrared thermometer. At night the temperature should drop to 12-18 °C.

A cool, short winter with fewer hours of light is closest to nature. How cold and for how long is needed to bring the animals into breeding condition has not been documented.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be 40-60 %. Keep the substrate dry, but make part of it slightly damp under a stone or a piece of bark so the animals can choose. Do not mist daily.

A shallow water dish with fresh water should always be available, and the water is changed daily.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal and basks on rocks. A UVB tube in a reflector above the basking spot should provide UVB corresponding to Ferguson zone 2. The distance from the tube to the basking spot depends on the lamp's output, so follow the manufacturer's instructions. UVB does not pass through glass or plastic, and tubes are replaced according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Supplement with strong, white daylight. The light period is 12-14 hours in summer and 10 hours in winter.

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

FEEDING

Liopholis whitii is omnivorous. Offer insects such as mealworms, crickets and cockroaches, and supplement with finely chopped herbs and a little fruit or berries. Adults are fed three times a week, for example with mealworms and fruit purée.

Lightly dust the insects with calcium at most feedings and with a vitamin supplement once a week. Use more than one food dish so weaker animals are not kept away.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is territorial towards strangers and in the wild lives in small family groups whose members know each other. Animals that have grown up together can be kept together; unfamiliar adults should not be put together, as they bite and can injure each other. A female to be paired with a male should be introduced into his enclosure, which should have many hiding places, and supervised.

Keep adults and unfamiliar young apart, as adults may eat the young or bite off their tails. Animals that are pushed out of the group need an enclosure of their own. The species is shy and does not become tame; the tail can be shed if the animal is grabbed by it.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The animals mature at about 8 cm, usually after three years and possibly earlier in captivity. Newborn young cannot be sexed, because females keep their hemipenes until they are sexually mature. If you want to breed them, start with a group of young so there is a good chance of a pair.

MATING

In the wild the animals mate in September and October. Females also mate with males outside the group. Which conditions best bring animals to mate in the enclosure has not been documented. It is safest to let a male and a female that know each other grow up together.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species gives birth to live young. A litter is 1-4 young, and the female has at most one litter a year. The young are born in late January and in February, and the birth of a litter can stretch over two to ten days. Newborn young should be placed in an enclosure of their own so the adults do not bite them.

INCUBATION

There are no eggs to incubate. The length of gestation has not been measured; the 100-140 days is an estimate from the time between mating in September-October and birth in January-February. Give the pregnant female warmth, UVB, calcium and quiet surroundings. Move her to an enclosure of her own with hiding places and water so the young can be born undisturbed.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are aggressive from birth and bite each other and adults. Remove the young from the adults and keep them in a small, escape-proof enclosure with many hiding places, UVB and small insects. Competition for food and shelter is greatest between siblings, so separate them if they start to bite, and provide more hiding places and dishes than there are young.

Health and common mistakes

Liopholis whitii 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.
- Bite injuries and stress in animals pushed out of the group.
- Overheating in an enclosure that is too warm or stands in sun.
- Internal and external parasites, especially in new animals.

Quarantine new animals for at least a month. The animals hide illness well, so contact a veterinarian experienced with reptiles if appetite changes or weight loss or swellings appear.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

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.