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SKINKS

Banded Lipinia

Lipinia microcerca

Lipinia microcerca is a small, diurnal skink from Vietnam, Cambodia and southern Laos. It lives on the trunks of large trees in light forest and around villages, hunting ants and other small insects. It reaches 8-9 cm including the orange tail and is fast and shy.

Family: Scincidae Former name: *Lipinia vittigera microcerca; Lygosoma microcercum*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**8-9 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**3-5 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal**
Habitat	**Rainforest**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**45 × 45 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**25-28 °C**
Basking spot	**32 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-23 °C**
Humidity	**60-80%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**In pairs or in groups**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**12 months**
Clutch size	**2-4 eggs**
Incubation	**50-70 days** at 23-25 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Not Evaluated (NE)**

About the species

Lipinia microcerca is a small, slender, smooth-scaled skink. The body measures no more than 4 cm from snout to vent, and the tail is as long or slightly longer, so adults reach 8-9 cm in total. The back has a thin, pale central stripe from the tip of the snout to the base of the tail, with a dark stripe on each side and a pale stripe further out. A broad, dark band runs along the flanks, with another pale stripe below it. The tail is reddish to bright orange. The lower eyelid has a large, transparent window, and the ear opening is visible.

The species was described in 1901 and was long regarded as a subspecies of *Lipinia vittigera*. A revision of the species complex in 2019 showed that *L. microcerca* is a separate species and that *Lipinia vittigera* in the strict sense lives only south of the Kra Isthmus and in Sundaland. Indochina is also home to the closely related and very similar *Lipinia trivittata* and *Lipinia vassilievi*. Animals from Indochina may still appear as *L. vittigera* in older literature and in the trade. The species name means "short tail" and refers to the tail being short in relation to other skinks in the same group.

Distribution and habitat

Lipinia microcerca is reliably known from central and southern Vietnam, Cambodia and the far south of Laos. It probably also occurs in Thailand north of the Kra Isthmus and in eastern and southern Myanmar, but records from there have not been definitively identified to species, because the species complex was only recently split. The map shows only the confirmed countries. The species is found in lowlands, hill country and on the lower mountain slopes up to around 1,200 m.

> **Native range:** Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

HABITAT

Lipinia microcerca lives in forest, including light and open rainforest, both undisturbed and disturbed, and in villages and around houses, and it can be fairly common locally. It is arboreal and hunts by day on the trunks of large trees and occasionally on the walls of timber houses in or near the forest, up to at least 5 m above the ground. The animals go down to the ground only briefly to cross from trunk to trunk.

The species is active at temperatures above 20 °C and hides under bark or in small cavities in the trees on rainy days. Its diet is spiders and small insects, including ants. The animals are seen alone or 2-3 together on the same trunk, and they often wave the coloured tail as a signal. The climate is tropical with a wet season and a dry season. The young hatch in the wet season, and shedding is seen especially in January.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Lipinia microcerca*. Day and night temperatures, humidity and breeding are based on the climate of its range and on other small, arboreal skinks, and the figures are estimates.

A pair or a small group needs a tall enclosure of at least 45 × 45 × 60 cm, and more animals require more space and more basking spots and hides. The species climbs like a day gecko on branches, bark and rough surfaces, but cannot walk on glass. The back and side walls should therefore be rough, for example cork, and the enclosure is furnished with thick cork bark set upright and sloping branches at all heights, so that the full height is used. Narrow gaps behind and under the bark make good hides on cool and damp days.

The substrate is a moist layer of soil and coconut fibre with leaves on top. Non-toxic tropical plants provide cover and hold the moisture.

Lipinia microcerca can escape through gaps of just 2 mm. The enclosure must therefore be completely secure: doors, ventilation mesh and cable entries must not have gaps larger than 1-2 mm.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

TEMPERATURE

By day the temperature should be 25-28 °C, and a small basking spot on a trunk under a weak heat bulb should reach 32 °C, measured on the surface. At night the heat is switched off and the temperature falls to 20-23 °C. The animal is active from around 20 °C and does not tolerate overheating, so there must always be a cooler zone at the bottom of the enclosure. Use a low-wattage heat bulb on a thermostat.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be 60-80 %, highest at night and just after misting. The species lives in lighter forest with a dry season, so it needs slightly drier air than *Lipinia vittigera*. Mist lightly every morning so that bark and plants are damp, and let the enclosure dry out a little during the day. The animals drink droplets from leaves and bark, and a small, shallow dish of fresh water can be left out as a supplement. Change the water daily. Good ventilation is necessary so that the air does not become stagnant.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Lipinia microcerca is diurnal and moves about on forest trunks where the sun falls filtered. It needs UVB corresponding to Ferguson zone 2: a weak UVB tube for forest species, so that the UV index at the basking spot is around 1-2, measured with a UV meter. Let the light cover only part of the enclosure so that the animal can choose shade itself, and replace the tube every 12 months. The light should be on for 12 hours a day.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Lipinia microcerca eats fruit flies, small crickets, buffalo worms (lesser mealworm larvae), small beetles and other insects of the same size. In the wild its diet is spiders and small insects, including ants. Vary the food, and gut-load the feeder insects with nutritious food a couple of days beforehand. Adults are fed every other day and young animals every day, with as much as they eat in 5-10 minutes. Dust the food with calcium at most feedings and with a vitamin supplement containing D3 every other week.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Lipinia microcerca is fast and shy and is an animal to watch, not to handle. It can shed its tail, and the new tail does not look like the original. The species can be kept in groups, and in the wild the animals are often seen 2-3 together on the same trunk. Give a group several basking spots, hides and feeding spots, and watch for biting and stress. A new animal should be left in peace for a couple of weeks in an enclosure with plenty of hides.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The animals reach sexual maturity at the end of their first year. Sexual differences have not been described, so the sex cannot be determined reliably from appearance.

MATING

Mating has not been described. The young hatch in the wet season. Whether a cooler and drier period in winter promotes breeding has not been investigated. A pair or a group can stay together all year.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays 2-4 eggs in a clutch. How many clutches she produces per year is not documented. The eggs are often laid hidden in the enclosure, for example in a piece of cork, where they sit so firmly that they cannot be removed without breaking. They can be left to hatch in the enclosure.

INCUBATION

The eggs develop at around 23-25 °C and also hatch in the enclosure when they lie hidden in cork. The incubation period is not documented; 50-70 days in the box is an estimate based on other small, tropical skinks. The newly hatched young are about 4 cm long.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

Newly hatched young are about 4 cm long and can eat springtails and small fruit flies from the start. Keep them in a small, tall and completely secure enclosure with the same temperature and humidity as the adults and plenty of hides. Feed them every day, and dust the food with calcium.

Health and common mistakes

There is no documented knowledge of diseases in *Lipinia microcerca*. Typical problems in small, insectivorous skinks are calcium deficiency from too little UVB, calcium and D3, dehydration from too low humidity, parasites in new animals and stress from keeping them too close together.

Wild-caught animals are often weakened and carry parasites. Quarantine new animals for at least a month, and have a faecal sample examined. Contact a vet with reptile experience if you notice reduced appetite, weight loss or swellings. Lifespan is not documented; 3-5 years is an estimate for such small skinks.

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.