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SKINKS

Banded Lipinia

Lipinia vittigera

Lipinia vittigera is a small, diurnal skink that lives on the trunks of large trees in the rainforest of the southern Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Borneo. It reaches around 8 cm and is recognised by a broad, pale band along the back between two dark stripes.

Family: Scincidae Former name: *Lygosoma vittigerum*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**7-9 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	**30-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**22-24 °C**
Humidity	**70-90%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Diet	**Insects and small invertebrates (springtails, fruit flies)**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**12 months**
Clutch size	**2-3 eggs**
Incubation	**50-70 days** at 26-28 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Lipinia vittigera is a slender skink with a pointed head, smooth scales and visible ears. The lower eyelid has a large, transparent window. The back has a broad, pale band from the tip of the snout to the base of the tail, and on each side of it a dark stripe runs from the eye backwards and some way onto the tail. The flanks are speckled brown without distinct stripes. The species name comes from Latin *vitta*, a headband, and *gero*, to carry, and refers to the band on the back.

The body measures no more than around 4 cm from snout to vent. The tail length is not known; with a tail in the same proportion as in *Lipinia microcerca*, the animal reaches 7-9 cm in total. The tail can be shed if the animal is grabbed.

Lipinia vittigera was described in 1894 by George Albert Boulenger from an animal from the island of Sipora in the Mentawai Islands west of Sumatra. Until 2019 the striped *Lipinia* from the whole of mainland Southeast Asia were counted as this species, including the animals from Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. A revision of the species complex showed that *L. vittigera* lives only south of the Kra Isthmus and in Sundaland. The populations further north are *Lipinia microcerca*, *Lipinia trivittata* and *Lipinia vassilievi*, and animals from Vietnam or Cambodia that are sold as *L. vittigera* are therefore one of these species.

Sexual differences have not been described.

Distribution and habitat

Lipinia vittigera lives in the Mentawai Islands and on Sumatra, in northern Borneo, on the Malay Peninsula with the islands off its coast (including Penang, Tioman and Aur), in Singapore and in southern Thailand south of the Kra Isthmus. How far north the species reaches on the peninsula has not been resolved.

The species does not occur in Vietnam and Cambodia. The striped *Lipinia* from there are *Lipinia microcerca*, *Lipinia trivittata* and *Lipinia vassilievi*.

> **Native range:** Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

HABITAT

Lipinia vittigera lives in primary and secondary lowland and hill forest dominated by dipterocarps, from sea level up to around 600 m. The animals move about by day on the trunks of large trees, up to around 10 m above the ground, and hunt there. The climate is tropical, warm and humid all year without a true dry season. Females carrying eggs are seen in March, and the young appear around July.

The behaviour is better known in the close relative *Lipinia microcerca* and probably applies here too: the animals are active above 20 °C, hide under bark or in small tree holes on rainy days, are occasionally seen 2-3 together on the same trunk and go down to the ground only briefly to cross from tree to tree. Their diet is spiders and small insects, including ants.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Lipinia vittigera*. Care is based on the climate and habitat, on the close relative *Lipinia microcerca* and on *Lamprolepis smaragdina*, a larger, arboreal skink from the same region. The figures for temperature, humidity and breeding are estimates.

A pair needs a tall enclosure of at least 45 × 45 × 60 cm, and larger is an advantage. Height matters more than floor area. A front-opening enclosure is easiest to look after, and a back and sides of cork give peace and climbing surfaces.

The substrate should hold moisture: 5 cm of damp coconut fibre or sphagnum covered with leaves. Furnish with upright pieces of cork, thick branches and bark slabs at all heights, so that the animal can climb and hide under loose bark. *Lipinia microcerca* climbs like a day gecko on bark and rough surfaces, but not on glass, and the same probably applies here, so the back and side walls should be rough. Narrow gaps between bark and back wall make good hides, and living tropical plants such as pothos and bromeliads provide cover and hold the moisture.

The small species of the genus can escape through gaps of just 2 mm. The enclosure must 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 30-32 °C at a basking spot high on a trunk, measured on the surface; *Lipinia microcerca* does well with 32 °C at the basking spot. At night the heat is switched off and the temperature falls to 22-24 °C. The climate is warm all year, so the temperature must not drop below 20 °C. The heat should be highest at the top and lowest at the bottom, so that the animal can choose for itself. A small heat bulb of 25-40 W in a lamp with a ceramic fitting and on a thermostat is enough for an enclosure of this size.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be 70-90 %, lowest by day and highest at night. This is slightly more humid than for *Lipinia microcerca*, which lives in lighter forest with a dry season. Mist morning and evening so that leaves, bark and branches are covered in droplets the animal can drink; a small rain system makes it easier to keep humidity stable. The enclosure should dry out a little between mistings, and ventilation should be good, otherwise mould will develop. Measure with a digital hygrometer in the middle of the enclosure.

A very shallow dish of clean water with a small stone in it can be left out, so that the animal cannot drown. Change the water every day.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Lipinia vittigera is diurnal, but lives on shaded trunks in forest, so a low UV index is suitable: around 1-2 at the basking spot, corresponding to Ferguson zone 2. Use a 5-6 % T5 tube in a reflective fitting, and position the basking spot so that a UV meter shows 1-2. Also provide shade, so that the animal can choose for itself, and replace the tube every 12 months. UVB does not pass through glass.

A strong, white light of around 6500 K particularly benefits living plants. The light should be on for 12 hours a day.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Lipinia vittigera eats spiders and small insects, including ants, which it catches on trunks and bark. In the enclosure the same food as for *Lipinia microcerca* is suitable: fruit flies, small crickets, buffalo worms (lesser mealworm larvae), small beetles and other insects of the same size. 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. The animal gets its drinking water from the droplets left by misting.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Lipinia vittigera is fast and shy and is an animal to watch, not to handle. A new animal should be left in peace for at least two weeks in an enclosure with plenty of hides. If it does not eat after that time, it should see a vet with reptile experience. Do not grasp the animal from above, and never grab it by the tail, because the tail is shed and only partly grows back.

Lipinia microcerca can be kept in groups and waves the coloured tail as a signal, but how males of *L. vittigera* behave towards each other is not documented. Keep a single animal or a pair, or a small group with only one male.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Sexual differences have not been described in *Lipinia vittigera*, and the sex cannot be determined reliably from appearance. *Lipinia microcerca* reaches sexual maturity at the end of its first year, and the same age is a reasonable estimate here.

MATING

Breeding in captivity has not been described. Females carrying eggs are seen in March and young around July. A pair can be kept together in a tall enclosure with plenty of hides, so that the female can get away from the male. The climate is almost the same all year, and there is no winter dormancy.

Read more: Brumation and the seasons

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays 2-3 eggs at a time. How many clutches she produces per year is not documented. Give the female a laying site with moist soil or moss, for example a closed container with a small opening, and extra calcium during the laying period.

INCUBATION

The incubation period is not documented. The figures in the box, 50-70 days at 26-28 °C, are an estimate based on other small, tropical skinks. Place the eggs half-buried in slightly damp vermiculite in a small, closed container with a few air holes, and do not turn them.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are very small, and rearing has not been described. Keep them in a small, tall and completely secure enclosure with the same temperature and humidity as the adults and plenty of hides. Give them the smallest feeder insects every day, for example fruit flies and newly hatched crickets, dusted with calcium.

Health and common mistakes

There is no documented knowledge of diseases in *Lipinia vittigera*. Typical problems in small, arboreal skinks, and how to avoid them:

- Dehydration from too low humidity. Dull eyes and a limp body are signs of too little moisture. Mist every day, and measure the humidity.
- Bone loss and weakness from a lack of UVB, calcium and vitamin D3. Use a suitable UVB tube, replace it every 12 months, and dust the food with calcium.
- Respiratory and skin problems from stagnant, damp air. Ensure good ventilation and a dry period between mistings.
- Parasites in new animals, especially wild-caught ones. Quarantine new animals, and have a faecal sample examined by a vet with reptile experience.
- A lost tail from a fright or incorrect handling. The tail only partly grows back.

A healthy animal is alert, has clear eyes and a firm, rounded body. Such small animals quickly become ill, so see a vet if the animal loses weight, does not eat or lies about lethargically. 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.