herpy

SKINKS

Centralian Blue-Tongued Lizard

Tiliqua multifasciata

A sturdy skink from Australia's arid interior with a broad, pale grey to light brown body and numerous orange-brown crossbands from neck to tail tip. *Tiliqua multifasciata* has a large head, a black stripe behind the eye and a blue tongue, and it needs a large, dry enclosure with heat and UVB.

Family: Scincidae Former name: *Tiliqua occipitalis multifasciata*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**40-45 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**15-20 years**
Active	**By day and at dusk**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial**
Habitat	**Desert and semi-desert**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**150 × 60 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 2 adults
Temperature, day	**21-29 °C**
Basking spot	**37-40 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-24 °C**
Humidity	**20-40%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, fruit, plants and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Litter size	**2-10 young**
Clutches per year	**1**
Gestation	**90-120 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Tiliqua multifasciata is a sturdily built skink with a short, broad body, a particularly large head and short legs. It is among the largest of all skink species. Adults are 40-45 cm long including the short, relatively slender tail, the body from snout to vent measures up to 30 cm, and adults weigh about 200 g. The ground colour is pale brown to grey, and across the body and tail run nine or more orange-brown bands that are much wider than the gaps between them and narrowest in the middle of the back. A black stripe surrounds the eye and continues to just above the ear, and the backs of the thighs are black. The belly is cream-white to white. As in all species of the genus, the tongue is blue and is displayed as a threat together with a loud hiss and open mouth.

T. multifasciata resembles the closely related *Tiliqua occipitalis*, of which it was formerly regarded as a subspecies. The two species live in parts of the same regions. *T. multifasciata* is recognised by the narrow, numerous bands and the black stripe behind the eye. The species is rare in herpetoculture.

Distribution and habitat

Tiliqua multifasciata lives in the interior and north-west of Australia. The range extends from the northern half of Western Australia through northern South Australia and the Northern Territory to western Queensland, and the species is also known from the far north-western corner of New South Wales. The type locality is Hermannsburg Mission on the upper Finke River in the Northern Territory.

The species is not threatened, but fires, fragmentation of habitat and the toxic, introduced *Rhinella marina*, which the animal can die from eating, are threats in the northern regions.

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

The species lives in dry and semi-arid regions: stony hills, red sand deserts and plains with spinifex grass. It is terrestrial and sedentary: individual movements are short, and an animal moves in total about 120-245 m a day. The animal seeks shelter under bushes, stones and grass tussocks and in burrows and basks in open terrain. The species is primarily diurnal, but some populations shift their daily rhythm with the season and are also out during the cooler hours. Active animals have a body temperature of about 33 °C.

The climate has hot, dry summers and cold nights, especially in winter, and rainfall is sparse and irregular. The diet is varied, with a large proportion of plants: stomach contents consist of seeds, insects, livestock dung and remains of vertebrates such as birds and reptiles.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Tiliqua multifasciata*. Care is based on the close relatives *Tiliqua occipitalis* and *Tiliqua rugosa*, which come from similar dry regions, and on *Tiliqua scincoides*; enclosure dimensions, temperatures, UVB zone and length of gestation are borrowed from them.

The species is terrestrial and does not climb much, so floor area is what matters most. An enclosure of 150 × 60 × 45 cm (length × width × height) is a sensible minimum for a pair; for a single animal 120 × 60 × 45 cm is the smallest. Larger is better, because the animal moves a lot during the day.

The substrate can be a mixture of sand and loamy soil, which retains a little moisture deeper down, covered with dry leaves and grass. Add a couple of hides of bark or tubes, a flat stone under the heat lamp and a shallow, stable dish of water. The enclosure must have a lid, because the animal can climb up the furnishings. Ensure good ventilation without draughts.

In summer the animals can be kept outdoors in a dig-proof enclosure with sun, shade and dry shelter when the weather permits.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

TEMPERATURE

The enclosure must have a clear gradient. The basking spot under a spotlight must have a surface temperature of 37-40 °C, and the rest of the enclosure must be 21-29 °C by day, coolest at the opposite end. At night the light is switched off, and the temperature may fall to 18-24 °C. Extra heat at night is only necessary if the room temperature falls below 18 °C; then use a ceramic heater without light.

Use a thermostat on the heat source, and measure with an infrared thermometer at the basking spot and with digital thermometers at both ends. Never use heat rocks with a built-in heating element, because they can cause burns. A flat stone warmed by the lamp provides heat from both above and below. Hibernation is not documented for the species in captivity, but in the wild winter nights are cold.

Read more: Heat and temperature Read more: Brumation and the seasons

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species comes from dry regions and thrives at a humidity of 20-40 %. Keep the substrate dry and the ventilation good, because persistent damp in the substrate can cause fungal infections on the belly and feet.

Provide fresh water in a stable, shallow dish, and change it often. The animal sheds several times a year, often in large pieces; if shed remains stay on the toes and tail, a lukewarm bath or a slightly damp hide helps.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species lives in strong sunlight, so the enclosure must have strong light and UVB for 8-12 hours a day. Provide UVB corresponding to Ferguson zone 3 with a UV index of about 3 at the basking spot. Animals that receive UVB have a higher level of vitamin D in the blood than animals that only receive supplements.

Use a UVB tube that covers about half the length of the enclosure, and replace it according to the manufacturer's instructions, because the UVB output declines even though the light looks unchanged. There must be no glass or plastic between the tube and the animal, and the animal must not be able to get closer to the tube than about 25 cm.

Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

FEEDING

Tiliqua multifasciata is omnivorous and in the wild eats a large proportion of plant food: seeds and plant parts, but also insects and carrion. In captivity the diet must be varied. Provide green leaves, weeds and flowers, plus insects such as cockroaches, locusts and silkworms, snails and occasionally a little lean meat or egg. Fruit must make up no more than a tenth of the diet. Young animals need more animal food than adults, and adults must have at least half of the food as greens.

Dust the food with calcium and a vitamin and mineral supplement. Juveniles under 3 months are fed daily, young animals of 3-8 months three times a week and adults once or twice a week. Adults easily become too fat, so watch body shape and weight, and cut down when necessary. Do not give avocado, onion or citrus fruits, and use only snails from places without slug pellets.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is calm and sedentary and gets used to gentle handling, but is not an animal to be carried around. A threatened animal hisses with its mouth open and displays the blue tongue. Always lift from underneath the belly, and support the whole body. The animal can bite, and the jaws are strong.

Keep a single animal or a pair. Do not keep two males together, and never put new animals together without quarantine and supervision. The animal rests a lot and can lie still in its hide for long periods.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The sexes look alike, and no reliable external characteristics are known. Sexing should be left to a vet with experience in reptiles. Age and size at sexual maturity are not documented for the species. Young animals should not be bred until they are fully grown.

MATING

The animals probably mate in spring after a cool period with shorter days, as in the closely related blue-tongued skinks, and the male holds on to the female's neck during mating. A pair needs plenty of space and hides, so the female can withdraw. Remove the male if he bites or harasses the female.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The species gives birth to live young, 2-10 in a litter. The female probably has at most one litter a year. She needs plenty of food and calcium throughout gestation, but often eats less just before birth. Give her an extra warm spot and a quiet enclosure.

INCUBATION

There are no eggs to incubate. Gestation probably lasts 3-4 months. The female needs a basking spot, UVB and varied food, and the enclosure must be kept quiet. The young normally eat the foetal membranes after birth.

REARING THE YOUNG

The young are fully developed at birth, about 7 cm from snout to vent and just under 20 g, and manage on their own. Take them from the mother, and keep them in an enclosure with a dry substrate, hides, heat and UVB. Feed them daily with small insects, snails and chopped greens, dusted with calcium. Young animals need more animal food than adults. Growth in

captivity is not documented.

Health and common mistakes

Most problems are caused by husbandry. The typical ones are:

- Metabolic bone disease with a lack of calcium, vitamin D or UVB. It causes soft jaws and crooked legs.
- Shedding difficulties, where shed remains stay on the toes and tail.
- Fungal and skin infections on the belly and feet with persistent damp in the substrate.
- Obesity with too much food, especially too much protein and fat.
- Mites and ticks, especially on animals from the wild.
- Respiratory infection with temperatures that are too low and draughts.

Quarantine new animals for at least a month. The animal hides illness well, so contact a vet with experience in reptiles if there is a change in appetite, weight loss, discharge from the nose or eyes or swellings.

Read more: Common diseases and signs of illness

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.