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SKINKS

African Five-lined Skink

Trachylepis quinquetaeniata

Trachylepis quinquetaeniata is an active, diurnal skink from northern and central Africa with glossy, metallic scales, pale longitudinal stripes and a tail that shines electric blue in young animals and females. It basks on rocks and feeds on insects. It is fast and shy, so it is best suited as a display animal, not for handling.

Family: Scincidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**20-25 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**4-5 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Semi-desert, savanna and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**90 × 45 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-29 °C**
Basking spot	**32-35 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-22 °C**
Humidity	**60-80%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**12-15 months**
Clutch size	**3-10 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**60-62 days** at 27-29 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Trachylepis quinquetaeniata is a medium-sized, slender skink with a pointed snout, short, sturdy legs and a long, thin tail. The scales are glossy with a metallic sheen. The ground colour is olive to dark brown, often with small pearly white spots and pale longitudinal stripes running from the head backwards. The flanks are yellowish to beige and the belly whitish. Just behind the ear opening there are some black spots.

The sexes look very different. The male is pale to dark brown with a dark throat, a yellow to orange stripe from the lip down along the flank and silvery to light blue spots on the throat and flanks. Females and young animals are dark brown to black with golden stripes and a pale to clear blue tail. The striping can become indistinct in old animals.

The species typically reaches 20-25 cm including the tail, and a few animals grow larger. Females measure on average about 8 cm from snout to vent. Lifespan is poorly known; the oldest recorded captive animal lived for just under 5 years.

The species was described in 1823 by Lichtenstein and was formerly placed in the genus *Mabuya*. The species name *quinquetaeniata* means 'with five bands' and refers to the pale stripes seen in many animals. *Trachylepis margaritifera*, formerly regarded as a subspecies, is now a separate species, and the two are often confused in the trade. Two to three subspecies are listed, but *T. q. scharica* is most often included in the nominate species.

It is fast and wary and flees at the slightest disturbance. The tail and skin are fragile, so the animal is only picked up when necessary. With patience it can be trained to take insects from tweezers.

Distribution and habitat

Trachylepis quinquetaeniata has a wide range in Africa south of the Sahara, mostly north of the equator, from Egypt and Eritrea in the east to Senegal and Ivory Coast in the west. It is found in, among others, Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Guinea, Ivory Coast and Senegal. Its occurrence in Algeria is uncertain. The type locality is in Egypt and Nubia.

The species has been introduced and has become established in Florida, and there are records from southern California. These populations are not part of the natural range.

> **Native range:** Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo - Kinshasa, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo and Uganda.

HABITAT

Trachylepis quinquetaeniata lives in savanna, scrub, open deciduous woodland, rocky terrain and grassland. It is mainly ground-dwelling, but readily perches on rocks and stone walls and also climbs trees. It also uses buildings. It occurs from sea level up to about 2,200 m.

The animal is diurnal, hunts actively and basks in the morning hours on rocks and trunks. Active animals have a body temperature of about 35 °C, and in a temperature gradient they choose about 36 °C. The diet is mainly arthropods such as beetles, ants, butterflies, crickets, grasshoppers, flies, spiders and termites, occasionally worms and, rarely, small lizards. Females also eat plant material, and fruit and seeds may be included. The density is about two animals per hectare.

Read more: Heat and temperature Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

A single animal needs a terrarium of at least 90 × 45 × 45 cm. The species is fast and very active and uses all the space it is given, so bigger is better. A breeding group with one male and two to three females needs at least 120 × 60 × 60 cm. Males are not kept together.

The substrate must be diggable and hold moisture. A mixture of 60 % topsoil or coconut fibre and 40 % sand in a layer at least 8 cm deep is suitable, with a layer of clean, chemical-free leaf litter on top. The substrate must be replaced completely every 3-4 months, and faeces and urates removed daily. Keep one end of the substrate damp and leave the other side dry, so the animal can choose.

Furnish the terrarium with plenty of hides and a cluttered structure: cork tubes, cork bark, hollow branches, stacks of stones, shelves and a textured back wall. There must be at least two hides, one at each end. A large, flat stone under the heat lamp serves as a basking spot. The terrarium must have a secure lid, because the species jumps and runs fast.

TEMPERATURE

Trachylepis quinquetaeniata is a sun-lover. By day the terrarium must be 24-29 °C and the basking spot itself 32-35 °C, measured at the surface with a digital probe or an IR thermometer. At night the lamps are switched off, and the temperature may fall to 20-22 °C.

Use a heat bulb of about 50 W in a lamp above one end and a flat stone as a base. Ceramic heaters, heat mats and coloured bulbs are not good enough for the species. If the basking spot is too hot, use a dimmer or a weaker bulb, and if it is too cool, use a stronger one. The heat is concentrated at one end, so the animal can choose.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species needs a moderate humidity of 60-80 %, lower by day and higher at night. Mist the terrarium once or twice daily, mix water into the substrate, and place a hide with damp sphagnum at one end, so the animal can choose damp or dry. Measure with a digital probe in the middle of the terrarium. Good ventilation ensures that the substrate and leaf litter can dry between mistings.

Place a small, shallow dish of clean water in the terrarium, so the animal can drink and lie in it. Change the water daily and scrub the dish every week.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal and needs strong, bright light and UVB. It basks in open, rocky terrain and, judging by its way of life, belongs to Ferguson zone 3. Use a T5 HO UVB tube of 5-6 % in a reflector on the same side as the heat lamp. Above mesh, the basking spot should lie about 18-23 cm below the tube, and without mesh, with the tube inside the terrarium, about 28-30 cm. The tube should be the brightest source above the basking spot, and the animal must also be able to withdraw from the light. UVB does not pass through glass and plastic, so a window gives no UVB and can make the terrarium too hot.

A powerful LED or a T5 tube of 6,500 K over most of the terrarium makes it bright. Keep the light on for 13 hours in summer and 11 hours in winter. Replace the UVB tube every 12 months.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

The species is insectivorous. Offer crickets, cockroaches (e.g. *Blaptica dubia*, *Shelfordella lateralis* and *Blaberus*), silkworms, small hornworms, mealworms, black soldier fly larvae and snails, so the diet is as varied as possible. Each day give as many insects as the animal can eat in about five minutes. If the animal becomes fat, feed every other day. Prey must be no wider than the distance between the animal's eyes.

Dust the insects lightly with a supplement of calcium, D3 and vitamins, and occasionally skip a dusting. Gut-load the insects with nutritious food before they are offered. A small dish of fresh water must always be available.

Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Trachylepis quinquetaeniata is fast, nervous and wary and is an animal to watch. It flees, drops its tail and is stressed by repeated handling. Give a new animal a couple of weeks in peace, and then train it to take insects from tweezers.

The animals are solitary. Males are aggressive towards each other, and the sexes are kept together only when they are to breed. One male can be kept with two to three females in a large terrarium, but there must be many hides and escape routes, and the animals must be watched closely. The terrarium must have a lid.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The animals are sexually mature after about 12-15 months, and females breed for the first time at about 15 months. Males are easy to recognise by the dark throat, the yellow to orange flank stripe and the silvery to light blue spots. Females and young animals have golden stripes and a blue tail. If you pair them, the female must be well developed, in good condition and not just have laid eggs without a rest period.

MATING

Males can be rough in mating, so the terrarium must have plenty of hides and escape routes for the females. A breeding group consists of one male and two to three females. No special brumation is documented for the species in captivity, but breeding follows the season, as the days become longer and warmer, and females lay in the summer half of the year. Keep the females in good condition with daily feeding and calcium supplements.

Read more: Brumation and the seasons

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

The female lays 3-10 eggs at a time, on average about five, and may lay twice in a season. The female may stay and guard the eggs. Give the female a laying box of at least 20 × 15 cm with a deep layer of damp sand and topsoil or sphagnum, covered with a piece of cork bark, and keep the substrate damp. Gravid females need extra calcium.

INCUBATION

The eggs are lifted carefully and placed half-buried in slightly damp vermiculite or perlite in a lightly ventilated container, without being turned. The substrate must be damp, but not wet. The eggs hatch after about 61-62 days. The incubation temperature is not documented for the species; 27-29 °C is an estimate that suits the climate of the range. Dented eggs are usually dehydrated, and eggs that sweat are dead or dying.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The hatchlings measure about 3 cm from snout to vent at hatching. Keep them singly or in small groups of the same size in a terrarium with a soil substrate, plenty of hides and a warm basking spot. Offer daily food of small crickets, fruit flies and small cockroaches, dusted with calcium and vitamins. Provide the same UVB and heat as for the adults, and separate the young if some keep the others away from the food.

Health and common mistakes

Only a few diseases specific to the species are known. Typical problems and prevention:

- Metabolic bone disease (MBD) from a lack of UVB or calcium and D3. Use a UVB tube and replace it every 12 months.
- Parasites in wild-caught and newly acquired animals. Quarantine new animals and have a vet examine a faecal sample for worms and protozoa.
- Dehydration from too low humidity. Always provide a damp hide.
- Lost tail from fright or rough handling. The tail does not regrow to full length.
- Stress and too little space. Animals that constantly run along the glass need more hides or more space.
- Obesity in adults that are given too much food.

A healthy animal is alert, with clear eyes, a plump tail and no wounds. See a vet experienced with reptiles if the animal loses weight, does not eat, has swellings or sits sluggishly.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene Read more: Common diseases and signs of illness 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.