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SKINKS

Schmidt's Crocodile Skink

Tribolonotus schmidti

Tribolonotus schmidti is a small, shy skink from Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands with two rows of plate-like scales down the back. It lives hidden in the damp leaf litter of the forest floor and gives birth to live young, one at a time, unlike the two better-known relatives, which lay eggs.

Family: Scincidae Former name: *Pediporus schmidti*

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**9-10 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**8-10 years**
Active	**By day and at dusk**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Rainforest and montane forest**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**60 × 45 × 45 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-27 °C**
Basking spot	**27-28 °C**
Temperature, night	**22-24 °C**
Humidity	**70-90%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 1
Diet	**Insects and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Live-bearing**
Litter size	**1 young**
Gestation	**65-85 days**

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

About the species

Tribolonotus schmidti is a small, sturdily built skink with a triangular head and short legs. Down the middle of the back run two rows of enlarged, plate-like scales, with more than 20 scales in each row from the neck to the tail, and they give it an armoured, dragon-like appearance. The genus has special pores under the feet. Colours and markings are not described in detail for the species.

The body from snout to vent is up to 4 cm, and the type specimen measures just under 9 cm including the tail. Adults are thus about 9-10 cm long, and the species is one of the smallest in the genus.

The species was described in 1930 by Charles Burt and is named after the herpetologist Karl Patterson Schmidt. It differs from the better-known relatives in giving birth to live young.

Distribution and habitat

Tribolonotus schmidti lives only on Guadalcanal, the largest of the Solomon Islands. The type locality is Marapa Island (formerly Beagle Island) in Marau Sound in the eastern part of the island. An older record from Bougainville is probably a confusion with another species in the genus.

Native range: Solomon Islands.

HABITAT

Tribolonotus schmidti lives in forest on Guadalcanal from sea level up to about 1,500 m. It lives hidden in the leaf litter of the forest floor under fallen leaves, branches and other debris, and it sleeps at night. The climate is tropical and humid all year, cooler in the mountains than on the coast. Temperatures and hiding places are not described in detail for the species.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Little is known about the care of *Tribolonotus schmidti*. The species lives in warm, humid forest on Guadalcanal and must be presumed to have the same requirements as the close relatives *Tribolonotus gracilis* and *Tribolonotus novaeguineae*. The figures in this guide are borrowed from them.

A single adult needs a terrarium of at least 60 × 45 × 45 cm, and bigger is better. Use a deep, damp substrate of topsoil and coconut fibre in a layer of 5-10 cm with a thick layer of fallen leaves on top. Furnish with plenty of hides such as coconut shells, cork tubes and curved pieces of cork bark, so the animal can choose for itself. A front-opening terrarium is calmer than one that is opened from above. Ventilation must be good, so the air does not become stagnant and musty. Remove faeces daily, and replace the substrate completely every 3-4 months.

TEMPERATURE

Keep the terrarium for *Tribolonotus schmidti* at 24-27 °C by day, with a warm hide at 27-28 °C, and let the temperature fall to 22-24 °C at night. The species lives in shade and hardly basks, so the heat should come from a hide under a weak heat bulb of 50-60 W with a ceramic fitting at one end. If the hide becomes too hot, switch to a weaker bulb. Measure the temperature in the hide with a digital probe or control it with a thermostat. If the room is colder than 22 °C at night, a ceramic heater on a thermostat can be used.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

For *Tribolonotus schmidti* the humidity should be 70-90 %, and the substrate must always be damp. Mist the terrarium morning and evening, or use an automatic rain system, and maintain good ventilation, so the terrarium dries out a little between mistings. The genus tolerates drying out badly. Provide a dish of clean water, partly sunk into the substrate, for drinking and bathing, and change the water daily.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

Tribolonotus schmidti sleeps at night and is probably active by day and at dusk in the shaded leaf litter. UVB is not documented for the species, but a weak UVB light (Ferguson zone 1) is recommended, following the relatives. Use a T5 tube for forest species in shade, and let it cover half the length of the terrarium. The UV index should be 1-2 at the highest point. There must be plenty of shade and cover. Keep the light on for 12 hours a day, so that day and night are distinct, and replace the tube every 12 months.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Tribolonotus schmidti is insectivorous. The staple diet can be crickets, cockroaches, mealworms, small larvae and earthworms. Snails and worms can be offered for variety. Young animals are fed every day, adults every other day. Prey must be no more than half the size of the animal's head. Dust the insects with calcium at every feeding and with vitamin D3 and a multivitamin at every other one. A dish of fresh water must always be available.

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

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Tribolonotus schmidti is a shy skink that lives hidden, and it is an animal to watch and not for handling. The genus can make sounds, but this is not documented for the species. Give a new animal at least two weeks in peace. Animals of the same sex can be aggressive towards each other, so the species is kept singly or as a pair in a spacious terrarium with plenty of hides.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Sexual maturity and sex differences are not documented for *Tribolonotus schmidti*. In the genus the males have enlarged scales and pores under the hind feet, which can be seen with a magnifying glass.

MATING

Breeding of *Tribolonotus schmidti* in terrariums is not documented. The relatives breed when a pair is put together in a spacious, humid terrarium with plenty of hides. The pair often shares a hide.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

Tribolonotus schmidti gives birth to live young, unlike the better-known relatives, which lay eggs. The eggs develop inside the female, and one young is born at a time. How many litters the female has per year is not documented. Give a pregnant female plenty of hides and stable humidity.

INCUBATION

There are no eggs to incubate, because the young is born alive. The length of gestation is not documented for *Tribolonotus schmidti*. The 65-85 days in the specification box correspond to the development time of the eggs in *Tribolonotus gracilis* and are only a rough estimate.

REARING THE YOUNG

Rearing is not documented for the species. The young are assumed to resemble the adults and can be fed as in the relatives: small crickets and other small insects every day, dusted with calcium and vitamin D3, in a shallow box with damp kitchen paper or moss, a coconut shell as a hide and a shallow water dish.

Health and common mistakes

Almost nothing is known about diseases in the species, and knowledge of the genus is limited. Typical problems and prevention:

- Parasites in newly acquired, wild-caught animals. Quarantine new animals singly and have a faecal sample examined by a vet experienced with reptiles.
- Bacterial infections in animals stressed after transport and cold.
- Dehydration. Dull eyes and a limp body are signs of too little moisture.
- Metabolic bone disease from too little calcium and vitamin D3.
- Lost tail from fright or handling.

A healthy animal is alert, has clear, shiny eyes and no wounds. See a vet if the animal loses weight, does not eat or lies 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.