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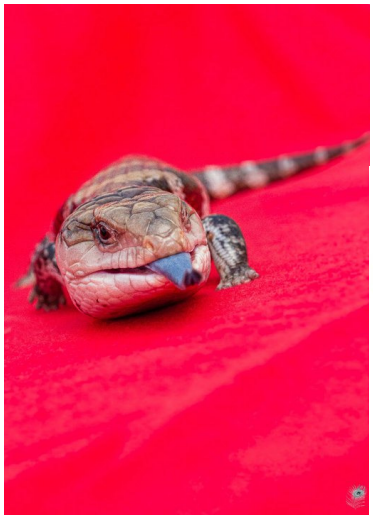

Blue Tongue Skink

Tiliqua scincoides

DESCRIPTION

A Blue Tongued Skink can be a rewarding pet as they are generally easily tamed and are a very laid back lizard. They have short legs compared to their body, meaning that they are not very quick compared to some lizards. They have almost human eyes and unlike some lizards and snakes they seem to make eye contact with you and recognise you, because of this you can develop a bond with the skink which may not be possible with other species.

They seem to enjoy being handled and are happy to sit still on your lap or hand, or if curious have an explore around. They are very inquisitive though, and seem to constantly wonder what is going on around them.

They are famous for their blue tongues which they will display with their mouths wide open if they feel threatened or are startled. They also make a kind of hissing noise made by exhaling sharply through their nostrils. It is hard to take this threat seriously once you get to know your skink! Although they may exhibit this behaviour when they are scared or startled it is rare for them to actually bite.

They hail from Australia, where they can cohabit with humans in gardens. The biggest killer of blue tongue skinks is man with his ***lawnmower***! As they do not move quickly they cannot escape the approaching machinery, but nice home owners will move the skinks to cut the grass, allowing them back into the garden afterwards to eat the garden pests!

They grow from 18 inches to 2 feet and can live for up to 20-30 years!!

PURCHASING

When purchasing your blue tongue skink, be sure that you do have a blue tongue and not a pink tongue skink. If you are buying a baby, then the 2 can be mistaken. If possible purchase captive bred animals, as they are more likely to survive a reasonable time and suffer less with health problems.

A healthy blue tongue skink will be active, flicking out its tongue and looking inquisitive. Their skin should be shiny, and their eyes bright. Look at the toes and soles of the feet – a skink with a shedding problem will gather skin on toes and eyelids or have stunted toes and no eyelids. (We will talk later about helping your skink have a great skin and no shedding problems!!)

HOUSING

Floor space is more important than height with this animal, as due to their short legs, they are poor climbers – preferring instead to burrow under logs etc and hide.

A vivarium of 3 foot x 2 foot floor space is adequate, but 4 foot x 2 foot or larger is better for the skink. The skink will want several hiding places, and pieces of bark supported by bricks or logs make excellent hiding places. Our skink loves to hunker into a log hollow (between floor and log base).

A water bowl, large enough for the skink to immerse its full body in, is also a necessary requirement for your skink – it will help with the shedding process. Finally the best substrate for them is aspen, or bark chippings so that they can dig themselves into their hiding places. Personally, I have had problems with these substrates and (given that we have almost 50 reps) I now use paper. It makes cleaning easy and means that all of my reps get cleaned out daily / every other day, which I feel is more hygienic. If using a bark substrate, then the viv should be spot cleaned whenever your skink poops (a brown "pellet"), and then thoroughly cleaned every 2-4 weeks. Our skink does not mind paper, in fact she will get underneath the paper sometimes to sleep!!

LIGHTING / TEMPERATURE

Your skink will require at least 12 hours of 10% UV light per day, and a temperature of 27-32 degrees Celsius (ambient). The heat can be provided either by a ceramic bulb or basking bulb controlled by a thermostat. If heating a viv bigger than 4 foot x 2 foot then more than one heating appliance may be required. You can also use advanced ceramic heating systems – these have a ceramic block, with built in thermostat, are guarded (so that your pet cannot harm itself) and easy to fix.

Our skink is a rescue with shedding problems, and she has benefitted massively from having her viv misted once a day (when we feed her) this just raises the humidity for a few hours each day conditioning the skin. If humidity is left continually high then your skink will suffer from respiratory illnesses

FEEDING

Skinks like variety! They are omnivores and a balanced diet would equate to 30-40% meat and 60-70% fruit and veg.

For vegetables use : collard or spring greens, kale, cress, dandelion leaves. Avoid avocado, aubergine, spinach, lettuce and mushroom

For fruit use : raspberries, strawberries, grape, peach, nectarine, apple, mango, plum, figs (when in season) and a bit of banana (occasionally – as it is high in phosphorous and can be dangerous – as a guide once every 6 to 8 weeks is sufficient, and they love the treat!) ; Avoid rhubarb and citrus fruits

For meat use : chicken, hopper mice, beef, locusts, crickets, feeder roaches, meal worms and slugs & snails (as long as you know that they have not been subject to any chemical treatments – they should be kept for 24 hours after collection and fed on greens to flush out any toxins) An alternative

to wild snails would be to breed African land snails and feed appropriately sized snails to your skink. These would be assured toxin free!! Avoid sea food and cat food (as it is too high in proteins)

All food should be supplemented every other day with a supplement containing vitamins, calcium and D3 – we use a salt pot to sprinkle the powder onto their salad/fruit. Feed your skink every other day as adults and every day as babies/juves.

Fresh water should be provided daily.

HEALTH & HANDLING

We do not cover breeding as Critterish Allsorts do not undertake breeding programs. Interestingly though blue tongue skinks give birth to live young, meaning that their litters are small. This makes blue tongue skinks quite rare in the pet trade.

Sexing is notoriously difficult. Males will display sperm plugs when they defecate – one either side of the anal opening. Females will not – a proven female will have scars from bites received during the breeding process, and therefore this may be an indication when buying a female.

Nails – their nails can grow long and quickly and therefore may need an occasional trim. This is a 2 person job – 1 to hold the lizard as the 2nd does the cutting.

Shedding – these lizards can have severe shedding problems. Ours is a rescue lizard who had "gloves" on her feet when we received her, which had been on her feet for a long time. Due to the length of time that they had been on the feet, blood flow had been restricted to the toes, which had dropped off giving a "stumpy" effect to her feet. They can shed one scale at a time and may need help with the process.

The first thing that we did was bathe our skink in warm water in a transport box. The box should obviously be drilled to allow respiration !! The warm water condensates causing steam and is like giving your lizard a sauna! Our skink has a sauna once every 2 weeks and we have found it conditions her skin, and makes shedding easy for her. From a lizard who frequently needed help with the process (especially feet and eyelids) and who had a dull lustre to her skin, to a lizard whose skin just blisters and falls off and has a glorious shine to her skin ☺ she no longer has shedding problems.

If your skink has problems losing the skin from feet or eyelids then the easiest way to remove it is :

Feet : firstly let your skink paddle in warm water for 10 minutes or so ; secondly wet your hand and gently tease the old skin off over the toes

Eyelids : slightly more tricky. Moisten a cotton bud (or Q tip) in warm water ; very gently rub the eyelid (from nose to ear) ; you will see it move ; keep going until the skin comes away. If your skink appears to be getting stressed stop and try again the next day.

Skinks love to be handled – see past the hissing and open mouthed "aggression" and remove your skink from its vivarium. Skinks like to feel secure and supported and if held in this fashion will happily sit still and be fussed. Support your skink under front legs and back legs using either both hands or your hand and fore arm. Tickle your skink under the chin or behind the ears (their "soft spots") or gently stroke the length of their bodies.

Our skink will happily give me kisses with her cold sticky blue tongue!!