



*Photo Credit: Critter Science

Armadillo Lizards *(Cordylus/Ouroborus cataphractus)*

Lizards with Added Plates of Armor

Armadillo lizards are a unique group of lizards that can also be known as the girdled lizards, armadillo spiny tailed lizards, armadillo Jones lizards, sun gazers, and girdle tailed lizards. Armadillo lizards can be quite variable in color. They may be blackish, light to dark brown, reddish brown, olive, grayish, to yellowish. They can be identified by their heavily girdled scales and appearances consisting of heavy osteoderms and large, rectangular girdled scales and spines around their bodies and tails. Armadillo lizards will wedge themselves into rock or burrow crevices to make themselves inaccessible or will curl themselves into a tightly bound ball with their hard, spiny scales facing outward, making them more difficult for would be predators to attack or ingest. They also use their heavy plates and armor as a means of conserving water and preventing dehydration in their arid to semi-arid environments. Armadillo lizards are frequently available in the pet trade, and although they are still uncommonly bred, can make for very personable and intriguing lizards to keep with the right knowledge and care.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Scincomorpha

Family: Cordylidae

Genus: Cordylus/Ouroborus

Species: *Cordylus/Ouroborus cataphractus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, armadillo lizards can attain longevity of 10 to 15 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Armadillo lizards are a unique genus and species of small to medium sized, primarily terrestrial lizards indigenous to the western coast of southern Africa. More specifically, this species occurs within the northern and western Cape provinces of South Africa. Within this range, armadillo, or girdled lizards occupy primarily terrestrial environments, including in a variety of semi-dry/semi-arid environments including semi-deserts, chaparral, grasslands, open woodlands, and

even suburban areas, where they use burrows, rocks and rock crevices, logs, tree trunks, downed or low vegetation and other debris on or near the ground to thermoregulate, forage, and seek refuge.

Origin/History

Ouroborus cataphractus (F. Boie, 1828).

One of the earliest known mentions of armadillo lizards in the pet trade was in *Lizards in Captivity* by Richard H. Wynne in 1981. This consisted of only a short paragraph without any photos of the family Cordylidae, and their basic requirements in captivity. They would be a common pet store import species, but breeding these unusual lizards in captivity would be difficult and infrequent for most that would keep this genus.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Armadillo lizards range in size from 3.5 to 12.0 inches in total snout to tail length depending on the species. Some of the larger armadillo lizard species can reach up to 15.0 to 16.0 inches in snout-to-tail length. Snout-to-vent length varies depending on the exact species, but can range from about 2.6 to 6.1 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL), excluding *Corydylus giganteus*.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling and juvenile armadillo lizards can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult armadillo lizards require a minimum of a 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure, although some of the larger species can require up to a 40 to 55 gallon enclosure. Hatchling and adult armadillo lizards can be maintained on a substrate of play sand mixture, orchid bark, or ground walnut shell substrates. Avoid using substrates made from reptile bark that result in environments that are too humid. Provide a small dish of clean water, and change and clean it every several days, or sooner if fouled. Soaking them at least once weekly in lukewarm water for 15 to 20 minutes can also help raise their hydration. Provide ample basking and hiding opportunities by providing artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter. Ideal temperatures for these lizards range from 70 to 85 degrees F on the cool side/ambient temperature and around 95 to 100 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of armadillo lizards in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other health and development maladies. Also be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Armadillo and girdled lizards should require relatively low humidity levels at, or within about 40 to 50%, although this may vary somewhat with the exact species.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Herbivorous to Omnivorous; In the wild, armadillo and girdled lizards are omnivorous to

herbivorous, meaning they will eat a variety of both plant and animal matter including insects and other invertebrates. They will also eat some fruit, vegetable, and other plant matter as well. In captivity, armadillo lizards can be offered a mixed, varied omnivorous diet consisting of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, mealworms, superworms, roaches, and waxworms 2 to 3 times weekly. Gut load any live prey items by feeding them commercially available diets for added nutritional value. Armadillo lizards may eat small pre-killed rodents of appropriate size for added protein, but sparingly, if at all. They will also often eat a mixed assortment of chopped greens, fruits and vegetables daily including dark leafy greens, carrots, peas, collard and dandelion greens, and beans. Feed armadillo lizards these insects and other food items in a bowl or dish every other day. Providing calcium and vitamin D3 supplements in these lizard's diets is essential for their optimal health and well-being. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

The girdled and armadillo lizards may initially be somewhat skittish, but can often normally become a docile species that can be handled and interacted with quite readily in captivity. As with any animal though, care should be taken to avoid dropping or overly restraining them to prevent injury.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Contact

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