



*Elmwood Park Zoo.

Blue Tongued Skinks (*Tiliqua spp.*); Eastern, Western, Irian Jaya, Northern

Blue Tongued Best Friends

Blue tongued skinks belong to a genus of large, primarily terrestrial skinks which are named for their thick fleshy blue tongues that are displayed as a warning or for defensive displays. Blue tongued skinks are large, smooth scaled skinks ranging from tan, cream colored, gray, to light brown with large brown, reddish brown, to orangish dorsal bands and stripes. These large skinks also have a large, broad head, tiny legs, and characteristic thick fleshy blue tongue. Several species and subspecies are commonly seen and available in the pet industry, which are described below.

Blue tongued skinks occur over much of the continental Australia, from the northeastern portions of Western Australia, through the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, and into southeastern South Australia. They also occur on New Guinea, Tasmania, and isolated, disjunct portions of central Australia, namely the southwestern portion of the Northern Territory and northwestern South Australia. Species include the Irian Jaya Blue Tongued Skink (*Tiliqua spp.*), Northern Blue Tongued Skink (*Tiliqua intermedia*), and Eastern Blue Tongued Skink (*Tiliqua scincoides*). Blue tongue skinks have, and still are rapidly becoming very popular, docile, and personable mid-sized lizard pets as more species, subspecies, localities, and even color morphs are becoming available in the herpetocultural hobby and industry.

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: Scincidae

Subfamily: Lygosominae

Genus: *Tiliqua*

Species: *Tiliqua spp.**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, blue tongued skinks can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Blue tongued skinks can occur over much of the continental Australia, from the northeastern portions of Western Australia, through the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, and into southeastern South Australia. They also occur on New Guinea, Tasmania, and isolated, disjunct portions of central Australia, namely the southwestern portion of the Northern Territory and northwestern South Australia. Within this range, they may occur in a variety of primarily terrestrial habitats, including semi-arid deserts, scrublands, open, mixed woodlands and savannahs, and grasslands.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Blue tongued skinks are medium sized to large species of skinks that can range from about 6.0 to 9.0 inches as hatchlings or juveniles in total snout-to-tail length. They average about 15.0 to 24.0 inches as adults in overall snout-to-tail length, which can depend on the species, locality, and sex of the animal. Some species can become slightly larger as well. Snout to vent length varies depending on the exact species, but can range from about 4.7 up to 14.6 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL). Average SVL is about 11.8 to 12.6 inches.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling blue tongue skinks can be housed in a 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adults require a minimum of a 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Provide blue tongued skinks with substrates that enable burrowing such as aspen chip shavings, cypress mulch, or orchid bark. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. Provide a bowl or dish of fresh water to help provide and maintain adequate hydration and humidity. Blue tongued skinks are terrestrial, and do not require tall, or arboreal enclosures.

Origin/History

Tiliqua Gray, 1825. The genus Tiliqua, which consists of 8 species currently, was first described by Gray in 1825, although exact species were described by other authors at other times.

Blue tongued skinks have been kept and exported for the pet trade as far back as the 1950's to 1960's. However, as with all other of Australia's indigenous herpetofauna and other wildlife, their exportation from Australia was prohibited sometime during the 1960's. While some of the Indonesian and Irian Jayan species (still of yet to be formally scientifically classified species) continue to be able to be able to be legally exported from these countries, the vast majority of blue tongued skinks which are available in U.S. and international herpetoculture are now captive-bred, and have become well established and readily bred in captivity. The Indonesian (*T. gigas*), Western (*T. occipitalis*), Common (*T. scincoides*), and Irian Jaya (*T. spp.*) have been the most popularly kept of the large Tiliqua skink species in herpetoculture.

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 blue tongued skinks range from 75 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and 80 to 85 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Provide a basking spot of around 90 to 95 degrees. 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 blue tongued skinks 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. Relative humidity levels for blue tongued skinks can vary quite a bit depending on the exact species and locality, with most Australian species doing well at somewhat low to moderate levels of humidity at, or within about 20 to 40%, while most Indonesian species may prefer higher relative humidity of up to 60 to 80% or even more.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Omnivorous; In the wild, blue tongued skinks are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. These large skinks will feed on a variety of insects, snails, slugs, and other gastropods, worms, other invertebrates, as well as the occasional small rodent, smaller reptiles, or other smaller animals they can capture and consume. In captivity, feed blue tongued skinks in captivity a mixed assortment of chopped up vegetables including carrots, peas, collard, mustard, and dandelion greens, and beans. Several commercially available omnivore mix diets are also available. They will also eat a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms, but do not feed them too many high fat insects. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Blue tongued skinks also require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation 1 to 2 times weekly or as otherwise directed for optimal health and development. This is in order to prevent Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) and other growth and nutritional deficiencies. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. 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

As with many reptiles, hatchling and juvenile blue tongued skinks typically tend to be initially more nervous and nippy. Handle your skink gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most adult blue tongued skinks will settle down considerably and become quite docile and personable pets to keep. Some localities or subspecies of blue-tongued skinks can be somewhat hissier and/or shyer than others as well, which may be worth noting. The Northern and Eastern species tend to be the most docile, generally.

****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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