**Photo Credit: Mo-Terry Carleton*

Emerald Swift *(Sceloporus malachiticus)*

Hardy Emerald Jewels

Emerald swifts, also known as the green spiny lizards, or emerald spiny lizards, are small, colorful members of the large, diverse "spiny lizard" family. Their scales are heavily keeled, giving them a spiny texture and appearance. Males are usually more vibrantly colored than females or juveniles, and are vibrant green with blue patches along their sides, belly, tails, and chins. Females and juveniles are gray to grayish brown with dark, irregular dorsal markings. Emerald swifts are primarily diurnal, arboreal lizards, and are also sexually dimorphic, with males being larger and more colorful and vibrantly colored than juveniles and females. Emerald swifts are popular and commonly kept pets that can make for great additions to the household, but must require the proper level of knowledge and foresight and should not be viewed as disposable animals.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities
Domain: Eukaryota
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata
Class: Reptilia
Order: Squamata
Suborder: Lacertilia
Infraorder: Iguania
Family: Phrynosomatidae
Genus: Sceloporus
Species: *Sceloporus malachiticus**
**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, emerald swifts can attain longevity of 5 to 10 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Emerald swifts are a species of small, arboreal to semi-arboreal spiny lizard indigenous to a fairly wide distribution over Central America. More specifically, this species occurs from the Yucatan region of Mexico, through Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica to Panama. Within this range, emerald swifts occupy primarily arboreal to semi-arboreal environments, including , including rocky, temperate to sub-tropical semi-deserts, dry to deciduous forests and woodlands, scrublands, to savannahs, grasslands, margins of swamplands

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

Origin/History
Sceloporus malachiticus Cope, 1864.

It is unclear as to when exactly emerald swifts first entered the pet trade, although they likely have been for many decades, and would be a commonly kept and sold species. Most are, and would be wild-collected and imported, although a small number would also be captive-bred in more recent years. Their vibrant coloration and relative ease of care would make these small lizards popular, although they would need high relative humidity, often making them difficult to care for at the same time for those unprepared.

Experience Level Required
Novice/Beginner.

Size
Emerald swifts are fairly small lizards that average 6.0 to 9.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length. Maximum snout-to-vent length is up to about 3.8 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure
Enclosure System: Semi-Arboreal to Arboreal. Provide a sturdy and secure enclosure that is escape proof. Emerald swifts are active and arboreal lizards that can be maintained in at least a 20 to 30 gallon tall, well ventilated glass or screen terrarium or enclosure depending on one's ambient household temperatures and humidity. Slightly dampened peat moss, untreated potting soil, orchid bark substrates, or sphagnum moss can be utilized for a substrate. Additional furnishings for basking, climbing, hiding opportunities are also important components to an emerald swift setup, and should include natural or artificial foliage, rocks, logs, vines, or branches. These lizards can be misted periodically or can be provided a small, shallow water dish that should be cleaned and replaced regularly at least two to three times weekly.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity
Swifts will also bask, and thus a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter should be provided. Being from relatively cooler cloud forests, ideal temperatures for swifts range from 75 to 80 degrees F as an ambient temperature and around 90 to 95 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 emerald swifts 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. Emerald swifts typically require moderate to somewhat high relative humidity levels of 60 to 70%, although this can vary with the species being maintained.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition
Insectivorous; In the wild, emerald swifts are primarily insectivorous, feeding on small insects and other invertebrates. In captivity, feed emerald swifts a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, and other insects. Feeder insects should be gut-

loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Emerald swifts 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

Emerald swifts can be handled or restrained for short periods of time, but are typically not an overly suitable hands on species that tolerates frequent and/or prolonged handling. Too much handling will stress this species, and they are better maintained overall as a more hands off animal whenever possible.

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

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:
Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com