



*Photo Credit: Markus Deklerk

Flat Rock Lizards (*Platysaurus* spp.)

Flat and Colorful Rock Dwellers

Also commonly known as the flat lizards, flat rock lizards are a genus of relatively small to medium sized cordylid lizards generally indigenous to the semi-dry to semi-moist savannahs and grasslands of southern and southeastern Africa. These lizards typically inhabit rocky outcrops and ledges, where they seek refuge from potential predators and other adverse conditions in tightly fitting rock crevices, as well as bask and forage among their rocky outcroppings.

Consisting of approximately 16 species, flat rock lizards can be quite variable in color, pattern, and appearance depending on the species, age, and sex. Many species have lighter colored stripes, dashes, streaks, spots, or speckles on a darker blackish, brown, to grayish brown, grayish, deep bluish to bluish gray, turquoise, yellowish, to orangish ground color. Sexually mature males of many species will often develop much more vibrant, and/or multi-colored appearances than juveniles or females. Several species are seen in the pet trade, of which can make for suitable pets for the more novice-to-intermediate enthusiast. Species seen and available include the Emperor Flat Lizard (*P. imperator*), Common Flat Lizard (*P. intermedius*), Spotted Flat Lizard (*P. maculatus*), and Striped Flat Lizard (*P. torquatus*).

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: *Platysaurus*

Species: *Platysaurus* spp.*

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, flat rock lizards can be expected to attain longevity of 10 to 15 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Flat rock lizards are a unique genus of lizards with all species thereof occurring only within

limited areas of southern Africa. More specifically, species in this genus can occur in South Africa, to Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, and into eastern Botswana. Within this range, these species of flat rock lizards occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-arboreal environments, including a variety of semi-dry/semi-arid environments including semi-deserts, chaparral, grasslands, open woodlands, and even suburban areas, where they use burrows, rocks, logs, tree trunks, downed or low vegetation and other debris on or near the ground to thermoregulate, forage, and seek refuge.

Origin/History

Platysaurus spp. A. Smith, 1844. Specific species would have other authors first describing them during other years.

Unfortunately, there seems to be almost no information known as to when flat-rock lizards first entered the pet trade.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Adult flat rock lizards of most species tend to be fairly small lizards that typically range from 5.0 to 10.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length. Snout-to-vent length varies depending on the exact species, but ranges from 2.0 to 5.7 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling or juvenile flat rock lizards can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult flat rock lizards require a minimum of a 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure or larger. Flat rock lizards can be maintained on a substrate of play sand mixtures, 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, rock and rock slabs, or logs.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

These lizards are well suited for living in hot, semi-arid conditions. 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 flat rock lizards range from 79 to 85 degrees F on the cool side and ambient temperatures, and around 95 to 105 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Nighttime temperatures can be allowed to reach 65 to 75 degrees F. Also provide a 12 to 14 hour day/night cycle for these lizards as well. Maintain these lizards at or around lower relative humidity levels of around 35 to 40%. 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 flat rock 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.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Primarily Insectivorous; Flat rock lizards are primarily insectivorous in the wild, catching and consuming a variety of insects and other invertebrates, as well as occasionally smaller vertebrates. Flat rock lizards in captivity can be given a variety of feeder insects and other invertebrates of appropriate size, frequency, and proportion at least two to three times weekly. Feeder crickets, mealworms, waxworms, roaches, and other feeder insects, as well as some greens, fruits, and vegetable material such as dandelion greens and some commercially available omnivore and mixed fruit and vegetable diets can also be provided. Providing calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation, as well as nutritional gutloading any feeder insects in these lizard's diets is essential for their 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

Flat rock lizards have not yet seen frequent captive breeding as of yet, and most specimens that are available are likely wild caught or imported. As such, they can be nervous, quick, fast moving, and skittish species to handle, requiring minimal or careful, deliberate handling to prevent injuries and/or escapes. With time and patience, however, this species can become bolder and more accustomed to human presence and some small amounts of gentle, deliberate handling. **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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Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility. We cannot make any claims or guarantees regarding any information in this care sheet therein. This care sheet may be reprinted or redistributed only in its entirety.

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