



*Photo Credit: Northern Gecko

Spiny Tailed, or Gidgee Skinks (*Egernia* spp.)

Skinks in Agama's Armor!

Also known as the spiny tailed, crevice, or the Gidgee skinks from their common association with Australian Gidgee trees, these relatively small to medium sized skinks consist of approximately 30 different species found over an environmentally diverse range of Australia and New Guinea depending on the species. A fairly robust and stout genus of skinks, Gidgee skinks can be quite variable in their colors and patterns depending on the species, and may range from blackish to brown or reddish-brown, to grayish-olive, sometimes with paler colored spots, flecks, or markings present. Their scalation is also often heavily armored, keeled, or plated, resembling some other groups of lizards, and their legs are also fairly short. As with many skinks and other Australian lizards, these skinks spend much of their time during the day actively basking, thermoregulating, and/or foraging, and when threatened, will retreat into the nearest burrow or rock crevice and inflate their bodies to make themselves much more difficult for the potential threat to extract or access. These unique and specialized skinks also will use their short, thickened spiny “carrot” or “turnip” tails during defense as well. Although Gidgee skinks may not be as widespread or available as many other pet lizard species, they are gradually becoming more popular choices as captive breeding of these species become more widespread, and these highly personable skinks are sure to not disappoint for the more intermediate enthusiast!

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: *Egernia*

Species: *Egernia* spp.* Including *Egernia stokesii*

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Gidgee skinks can attain longevity of at least 15 to 20 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat

With over 30 species of spiny tailed, or Gidgee skink, these skinks can be highly diverse in their range, and environments they are found in within Australia and New Guinea, as well as some surrounding islands. These skinks most often, however, prefer the arid to semi-arid, rocky deserts, outcroppings, scrublands, savannahs, grasslands, and open forests and woodlands of this range, with ample basking, hiding, and foraging opportunities in the form of rocks, logs, and other natural vegetation and debris.

Origin/History

Egernia spp. Gray, 1832. Specific species would have other authors first describing them during other years.

It is unknown as to how or when Gidgee's skinks were first kept or imported, although, generally, Australia would prohibit exportation of its indigenous herpetofauna and other wildlife by the mid-1970's. This genus also includes the Cunningham's Skink (*Egernia cunninghami*), which is another common pet trade imported species.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

The spiny tailed, or Gidgee skinks are medium sized skinks, with adults typically ranging from 6.0 to 10.0 inches or slightly greater in total snout-to-tail length, depending on the species. Snout-to-vent length varies depending on the exact species, but can range from 3.3 to 15.3 inches in the largest species, *E. major*, in snout-to-vent length (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Fossorial. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling and juvenile Gidgee skinks can be housed in a 10 to 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adults require a minimum of a 30 to 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Provide these skinks with substrates that enable burrowing such as aspen chip shavings, crushed walnut, or orchid bark. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, as well as driftwood, rocks, molded clay hides, cork bark, branches, and/or logs for ample climbing, basking and hiding opportunities. Provide a bowl or dish of fresh water to help provide and maintain adequate hydration and humidity. Gidgee skinks are primarily terrestrial, and do not require tall, or arboreal enclosures, but will benefit from additional climbing opportunities if provided as well.

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 Gidgee skinks range from 75 to 80 degrees F on the cool and ambient side and 80 to 85 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Provide a basking spot of around 110 to 120 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 these 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. Gidgee's skinks should be

maintained at relatively low to somewhat moderate humidity levels at, or within about 25 to 40%.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Omnivorous; In the wild, Gidgee skinks are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. These medium sized 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, as well as fungi, fruit, and vegetable, and other plant material as well. In captivity, feed Gidgee skinks 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. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. These 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 Gidgee skinks typically tend to be initially more nervous, defensive, and nippy. Handle your skink gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Although they can initially be fast moving and fairly skittish, many Gidgee skinks will settle down considerably and become much more docile, handleable, and personable pets to keep.

****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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