



*Photo Credit: Klaus Rudloff

Green Keel Bellied Lizard (*Gastropholis prasina*)

Keels of Green from Eastern Africa!

The green keel bellied lizard is a very unique species of equatorial lacertid lizard indigenous to the coastal plains regions of eastern Kenya and Tanzania in only a handful of disjunct National Parks and/or ranges. These highly arboreal to semi-arboreal species spend much of their time amongst the low branches and other vegetation beneath the canopy, and use their very long, semi-prehensile tails for aiding in their climbing and gripping abilities. They are a relatively slender bodied species with very long, semi-prehensile tails accounting for about 70% or more of their body lengths. Their dorsal coloration typically is a bright green to occasionally turquoise-green, or sometimes with dark speckling with small, non-overlapping dorsal scales, and wider, keeled ventral or belly scales, hence their common names. Unfortunately, this species is considered near threatened in the wild due to the potential of habitat loss and fragmentation due to agriculture and human expansion, and relatively little else is currently known about these unique green lizard gems, either in the wild or in captivity. They are, however, a species which seems to be emerging in popularity, and hopefully much more will be learned about this beautifully unique species by the more intermediate to moderate level enthusiast seeking a personable, active, and enjoyable species to maintain in captivity.

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: Lacertidae

Genus: *Gastropholis*

Species: *Gastropholis prasina**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

Captive and wild longevity for this species is uncertain at this time. However, as with other lacertid species, this species can attain potential longevity of at least 5 to 10 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Green keel bellied lizards are indigenous only to several disjunct, or separate populations along

the coastal plain of Kenya and Tanzania of eastern Africa, namely within Watamu, Kenya, the Usambara Mountains, Arabuko-Sokoke National Park, the Nguru Mountains, and the Zaraninge Forest of Tanzania. Within this range, these active and arboreal to semi-arboreal lizards occupy the sub-tropical to tropical, equatorial forests, woodlands, and thickets, where they spend much of their time in low, understory branches, low trees, shrubs, and other vegetation generally below the forest canopy, seeking out food and shelter in tree cavities, cracks, denser vegetation, and other cover provided within these habitats.

Origin/History

Gastropholis prasina (Werner, 1904).

Green keel bellied lizards are a relatively new species to the pet trade. Thus, not much is known specifically about their history in herpetoculture as of yet, although it can be said that they first appeared sometime in the 2010's.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Green keel bellied lizards are relatively small lacertid lizards, ranging up to 16.0 to 18.0 inches snout-to-tail length. Snout-to-vent length ranges from about 3.1 to 4.3 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Arboreal. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. These are active, primarily diurnal arboreal to semi-arboreal lizards which should be maintained in an appropriately sized tall enclosure. Juvenile lizards can be housed in a 2 foot by 2 foot by 3 foot tall front opening glass, plastic, or similar enclosure. Adult lizards are active lizards that will require at least a 2 foot by 2 foot by 4 foot sized enclosure for up to a pair of these lizards. These lizards can be maintained on a substrate of orchid bark, fir and sphagnum peat moss substrates, or similar substrates which retain relative humidity well at least 70 to 80% for their overall enclosure. Provide a small dish of clean water, and change and clean it every several days, or sooner if fouled. Providing soaking opportunities for them at least once weekly in lukewarm water for 15 to 20 minutes can also help raise their hydration. Although they are often active and visible during the day, providing them with plenty of ample basking, climbing, and hiding opportunities such as live or artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, bark or logs will benefit them greatly as well.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Green keel bellied lizards are frequent baskers, 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. Ideal temperatures for these lizards range from approximately 72 to 85 degrees F on the cool side, and for overall ambient temperatures, and around 90 to 105 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 these 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; In the wild, green keel bellied lizards are primarily insectivorous, and will eat insects and other invertebrates. They may also consume some fruit, vegetable, and plant matter, as well as any smaller vertebrates on occasion they can catch. These lizards in captivity can be given a variety of feeder insects and other invertebrates of appropriate size, with a 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, as well as some commercially available mixed fruit and vegetable diets can also be occasionally given. 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

Green keeled lizards are an active and alert species, but can be fast and somewhat nervous and skittish, and are not the most suitable species to be handled. Gentle and deliberate handling should take place with these lizards, as they can drop their tails or become injured when roughly handled or restrained too tightly.

****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

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