**Photo Credit: Alexander Dudley*

Major, and Land Mullet Skinks *(Bellatorias spp.)*

Major Sized Skinks!

The major, and land mullet skinks are a group of among the largest species of skinks consisting of about 3 different species found over an environmentally diverse range of Australia and New Guinea depending on the species. The three species recognized include the most readily available, the Major Skink (*Bellatorias frerei*), as well as the Land Mullet (*Bellatorias major*) of Australia, and the critically endangered Arnhem Land Gorges Skink (*Bellatorias obiri*). A fairly robust and stout genus of skinks, major 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, or dark olive-brown sometimes with paler colored brown to black stripes, spots, flecks, or markings present along the sides.

Their scalation is also often smooth and fish-like, which leads to the name "land mullet" said to resemble the mullet fish in size and appearance, and their legs are also fairly short. Their genus name of "Bellatorias" is also said to translate to "war-like" in latin. 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. Although major 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: Bellatorias
Species: *Bellatorias spp.*
**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity
If provided the proper care, the major and land mullet skinks can attain longevity of at least 15 to 20 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat
The three species of land mullets, or major skinks can be rather diverse in their range, and environments they are found from about Brisbane, New South Wales Australia north through eastern and northeastern Queensland, and into New Guinea, as well as some surrounding islands, depending on the species. These skinks can be found in rainforest heathlands, vine thickets, and open forests and woodlands, to rocky outcroppings within this range, with access to ample ground cover, and basking, hiding, and foraging opportunities in the form of rocks, logs, and other natural vegetation and debris.

Origin/History
Bellatorias spp. Wells & Wellington, 1984; Bellatorias frerei (Günther, 1897) – Major skink; Bellatorias major (Gray, 1845) – Land Mullet.

It is unknown as to how or when land mullet skinks were first kept or imported, although, generally, Australia would prohibit exportation of its indigenous herpetofauna and other wildlife by the mid-1970's.

Experience Level Required
Intermediate/Moderate.

Size
The genera of land mullet and major skinks can be large skink species, with the most commonly available species, *B. frerei* reaching an average of about 7.0 to 10.0 inches snout to vent length (SVL). B. major, however can be the largest species in the genus, reaching sizes as large as approximately 24.0 to 26.0 inches snout to tail length altogether. No significant traits of sexual dimorphism are noted with this genus.

Housing and Enclosure
Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Fossorial. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Major skinks can be housed in a 20 to 30 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Provide these skinks with substrates that enable burrowing such as aspen chip shavings, crushed walnut, coconut fibers, 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. Major skinks are primarily terrestrial, and do not require tall, or arboreal enclosures, but will benefit from additional elevated basking 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 major 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 100 to 105 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. Major 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, major 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, as well as fungi, fruit, and vegetable, and other plant material as well. In captivity, feed major 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

Major and land mullet skinks typically tend to be skittish and flighty, although some individuals can be habituated to people and be tamed down. These skinks can have a strong bite, and can also drop their tails or scratch if they are handled incorrectly. Generally, this genera of skinks are better suited for viewing rather than frequent handling. If these species are to be handled or restrained, do so gently yet firmly by grabbing around the shoulders and midregion, but do not drop or injure the animal or restrain them by their tails.
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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