



*Photo Credit: AquaTerra Shop

Solomon Islands/Monkey Tailed Skink (*Corucia zebrata*)

Charismatic “Primates” of the Reptile World

Monkey tailed skinks are large, arboreal skink species that are also known as the Solomon Islands skink, monkey tailed skink, and prehensile tailed skink, and any combination of these names thereof. Monkey tailed skinks are the largest extant (currently living) skink species worldwide. This species has a somewhat elongated, slender but heavily built body ranging in color from light to dark green, olive green, or greenish brown with darker brown to black blotches, banding, and/or flecking along the body and tail. The belly or ventral surface is cream to pale yellowish, and the head is large, broad, and triangular. This species also has a very long, prehensile tail and long toes/digits, hence one of their common names.

Monkey tailed skinks are almost exclusively arboreal, spending much of their time basking, foraging, and seeking refuge in trees using their powerful limbs, digits, and prehensile tails for grasping and climbing. Monkey tailed skinks are also one of the few reptiles that often live communally among small groups known as a circulus. They are viviparous, giving birth to 1 or 2 live young, which are then guarded by the group for up to 6 to 12 months. Solomon Islands skinks are listed as a CITES Appendix II animal, meaning their importation into the United States is restricted, ensuring only captive born specimens are available.

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: *Corucia*

Species: *Corucia zebrata**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the correct care and husbandry, Solomon Islands skinks can attain a captive longevity

of at least 15 to 20 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The monkey tailed, or prehensile tailed skink is a large, arboreal species of skink indigenous to the Solomon Islands Archipelago and portions of Papua New Guinea. This area comprises of a group of islands located in the southwest Pacific Ocean, and the few subspecies of this large and unusual skink species can occupy different locales and islands within this range. Within this range, these large prehensile tailed, or monkey tailed skinks occupy primarily arboreal to semi-arboreal environments, including the mid to upper canopies of forested areas and other woodlands, especially within fig trees, as well as other semi-cleared areas and cultivated gardens and agricultural areas.

Origin/History

Corucia zebrata Gray, 1855.

Largely unknown in the pet trade until the late 1980's, these arboreal skinks became widely available when logging in the Solomon Islands brought their formerly inaccessible treetop homes crashing to the ground, and left the lizards in reach of collectors (Indivigilo, Frank Oct. 15 2008). Monkey-tailed skinks would be represented in public and private zoological collections, although their reproductive biology would be such that they would never become a prolific or widely produced species in herpetoculture, giving birth to only one or two at a time and living in communal groups. As of October 2017, they would also become a CITES Appendix II species as well.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

Newborn Solomon Islands skinks are typically 10.0 to 12.0 inches in snout-to-tail length. As adults, this species is the largest extant species of skink, reaching 22.0 to 36.0 inches snout-to-tail length. Snout-to-vent length ranges from about 9.8 to 13.7 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Arboreal. Monkey tailed/Solomon Islands skinks are almost exclusively arboreal, and will need a large arboreal screen, glass, or acrylic enclosure of appropriate size and dimensions. At a bare minimum, these skinks will require a 55 gallon sized or larger tall glass or plastic front opening enclosure, although larger enclosures will undoubtedly be better. Enclosures up to five to six feet by two feet by three feet are preferable. Enclosures must be sturdy and secure, escape/predator proof, if housed outdoors, and be adequately ventilated while ensuring proper humidity levels. These skinks will do best at relative humidity levels at, or within about 60 to 80% humidity. If needed, large panels of Plexiglas can be used to cover screened areas where humidity can be lost. Several substrates can work well with these skinks, including moistened coconut fibers, cypress mulch, and sphagnum moss. A large, shallow water bowl, dish, or pan can be provided at one side of the enclosure that the skink can readily enter/exit from and to raise humidity, and should be cleaned or replaced regularly, or whenever fouled. Regular misting at least twice or three times weekly either manually, or by using any of the commercially available misting or fogging systems should also be considered. Several large, sturdily mounted or fastened branches, driftwood, and/or basking platforms or shelves are also a must for these highly arboreal skinks, and should be provided within the enclosure for these skinks to utilize. Live plants can also be used, but must be sturdily planted to prevent being uprooted. At least one or two additional hides should also be used, and can include

adequately sized cork bark or log hides, rock hides, or other types of hides.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

As with all reptiles and amphibians, monkey tailed skinks are ectothermic, and thus do not regulate their own body temperatures. These skinks are also nocturnal/crepuscular, but will utilize and benefit from a spectrum of lighting and temperature gradients provided in captivity. Overhead UVA/UVB lighting of appropriate wattage should still be provided for these skinks as part of a rotating day/night cycle of 8 to 12 hours, which can greatly help them synthesize the needed calcium and vitamin D3. Overhead incandescent lighting, ceramic heat emitters or radiant heating panels, and/or under the tank heating pads of appropriate wattage should be used to create and maintain the adequate basking temperatures and thermal gradients. Care should be taken to prevent direct contact with any heating element and the animal as well. These large skinks can do well with overhead basking temperatures of 90 to 100 degrees F, and with ambient/cool end temperatures of 80 to 86 degrees F, with nighttime temperatures being able to drop to 75 degrees F. 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 Frugivorous to Herbivorous; These large skinks in the wild are almost primarily herbivorous, feeding on many various leaves, fruits, vegetable matter, flowers, shoots, and several other plants, especially those of Epipremnum plants, which can also be given in captivity if it is able to be grown and cultivated.

In captivity, a similar diet can be followed for these skinks, although variety is very important when maintaining this species. Captive diet should consist of approximately 60 to 70% leafy green vegetables including but not limited to collard greens, mustard greens, carrot and turnip leaves, kale, cress, spinach, romaine lettuce, or similar vegetables. Additionally, about 20 to 30% of their diets can also include other vegetables such as green beans, squash, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, corn, peas, carrots, or other vegetables. Fruit should consist of no more than 10 to 15% of their diets, but can include apples, bananas, peaches, kiwi fruits, mango, cantaloupe, papaya, melons, berries, or other fruits. Remove any soiled or uneaten foods regularly. Also be sure to supplement any of these fruit or vegetable diets with calcium and vitamin D3 for added nutrition and to prevent potential nutritionally related disorders such as MBD, or Metabolic Bone Disease. 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

Solomon Islands, or monkey tailed skinks are large, powerful climbers that will use their long, specialized toes and digits and long, prehensile tails to firmly grasp the surface or object they are climbing. When handling these skinks, they should be allowed to freely climb or move about from one's hands or arms (or other parts of the body) with minimal to no restraint. However, ensure they do not fall or are dropped. These skinks can tolerate some levels of handling, but may sometimes bite or behave nervously when they feel threatened, unsupported, or insecure. Although they can be handled, the Solomon Islands skink is perhaps an even been display animal overall.

****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:

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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