



*\*Photo Credit: Tucson Herpetological Society.*

## Oscillated Skink (*Chalcides ocellatus*)

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### Oscillated and Obscure!

The oscillated, or eyed skink is a unique, relatively small species of skink ranging from surrounding the Mediterranean Sea from Greece, southern Italy, and Malta, to Pakistan in the east, and northern Africa to the west. A generalist species, the oscillated skink is capable of “burrowing” or “swimming” within the sandy loose substrate by means of its wedge shaped head, smooth scales, and reduced limbs, as well as being able to quickly escape into the nearby surrounding vegetation, which is also this species’ primary means of escape and defense against any would-be predators.

As their name might imply, their scientific name “oscillates” translates to “with eyes”. These skinks have a lighter and darker oscillated pattern on their dorsums and sides, on an overall ground color of tan, to reddish or reddish-brown, to olive or olive-brown, while their heads are relatively short and wedge-shaped, and there is a narrow, darker ocular stripe or band running through each eye on the sides of their heads, and lighter white or cream and dark barred or mottled colored lower jaws. Another noteworthy feature of this species are their comparatively small, or reduced limbs, with both forelimbs and hind-limbs being present. While the oscillated skink is still primarily wild-collected when it comes to their availability within the pet trade, this species, once acclimated, can make for very fun and unique species of pet reptiles to maintain for anyone looking for a species which might be just a little different!

### 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

**Genus:** Chalcides

**Species:** *Chalcides oscillatus*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### Lifespan and Longevity

Relatively little is known about the lifespan and longevity of this species in the wild or in captivity. However, given the proper and correct care and husbandry, their lifespans could be similar to those of other sand dwelling skinks of at least 10 to 12 years or potentially more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

The oscillated skink is a relatively small species of burrowing, fossorial skink indigenous from the Mediterranean Sea from Greece, southern Italy, and Malta, to Pakistan in the east, and northern Africa to the west. Within this range, oscillated skinks occupy primarily terrestrial environments, including a variety of habitats, from coastlines and coastal dunes habitats, to forest and woodland edges, gardens, and other areas of human habitation and agriculture. They are considered to be a generalist species.

### **Origin/History**

*Chalcides ocellatus* (Forsskal, 1775).

Ocellated skinks have been a common import for the pet trade for at least several decades, although the exact timing for when they were first kept or imported is not known. These skinks would become established in Florida in 1999.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

The Oscillated skink is a relatively small skink species, ranging from approximately 5.0 to 12.0 inches in length as adults in snout-to-tail length. Maximum snout-to-vent length reaches up to about 7.8 inches (SVL).

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Fossorial.*** Housing must be sealed and escape proof. One to a pair of these skinks can be maintained in a 20 to 30 gallon long terrarium or similar sized enclosure, and they can be housed communally accordingly larger enclosures. Oscillated skinks will readily burrow into a loose substrate, of which at least 6 to 8 inches thereof should be provided. A loose, non-toxic, semi-dry substrate such as potting soil, or potting soil-play sand mixtures will be acceptable substrates to use. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, and plenty of driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and other hiding opportunities. Provide a shallow, sturdy bowl or dish of fresh water as well. A humid hide or retreat which can maintain higher humidity when needed will also benefit this species. These skinks require relatively low humidity levels overall at around 30 to 50%, but misting and the before mentioned humid hides should raise humidity levels in some areas of their enclosure up to about 60 to 70%.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Oscillated skinks are primarily diurnal and will require the appropriate overhead basking lights even though they are quite fossorial. 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 these skinks range from 78 to 82 degrees F on the cool side and about 90 to 95 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 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.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Insectivorous to Omnivorous***; In the wild, oscillated skinks are primarily insectivorous, meaning they will eat insects, arachnids, snails and other mollusks, worms, and other invertebrates, as well as occasionally other small vertebrates. These skinks can be opportunistic, and may also feed on some fallen fruit, nectar, and other vegetable matter as well.

In captivity, feed these skinks a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, fruit fly cultures, or 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. Other feeder items, such as small, pre-killed pinkie rodents can also be given on occasion, but sparingly. Overall 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 skinks, oscillated skinks can become more accustomed to regular human interaction, and can often even be hand fed when in captivity. While they can also be handled for short periods of time, they are still a faster moving, fragile, and more skittish species when it comes to handling them. Care should therefore be taken to not accidentally drop these animals when handling them as well.

**\*\*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:

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