



*Photo Credit: Science Times

Red Eyed Crocodile Skink (*Tribolonotus gracilis*)

Prehistoric Looking Skinks

Red eyed crocodile skinks are a unique and primitive looking skink species with other common names to include the “red eyed bush crocodile skinks”, and simply “tribbles”. They are a relatively small skink species ranging in overall color from blackish, gray, or olive gray with very heavily ossified dorsal scales and plating along the back and head. This is how they earn their common name of “Crocodile” skink. A reddish to orange border also surrounds each eye as well. As with most skinks, Red eyed crocodile skinks are primarily a terrestrial species and seldom climb as well. These skinks also have the ability to vocalize when threatened, or to signal social structure, which is a defensive behavior designed to startle a would be predator long enough for the skink to escape. This species has also been recorded to occasionally feign death as well in defense. As with other skinks, they can also drop their tails in caudal autotomy, which further startles and/or distracts a predator long enough for these skinks to escape. A new tail then regrows after several weeks. Relatively little more is currently known about the biology and natural history of these unique little skinks in the wild; however, they have quickly become an increasingly popular and unconventional choice to keep in captivity for the intermediate level 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

Genus: *Tribolonotus*

Species: *Tribolonotus gracilis**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, red eyed crocodile skinks can attain longevity of up to 10 years, with maximum longevity being unknown at this time.

Distribution and Habitat

Red eyed crocodile skinks are a very unique, armored species of small, terrestrial skink indigenous to New Guinea. More specifically, this peculiar species occurs on the island of New Guinea within Indonesia, as well as Papa New Guinea. Within this range, these highly unusual red eyed crocodile skinks occupy primarily terrestrial environments, namely tropical rainforests to other tropical forests, where they forage, seek shelter, and thermoregulate within the forest floor's leaf litter debris, rocks and rock crevices, hollowed logs, burrows, and other ground cavities, debris and retreats.

Origin/History

Tribolonotus gracilis de Rooij, 1909.

Not much is known about the history of red eyed crocodile skinks in herpetoculture, although they first appeared and were imported into the U.S. and European pet trade sometime during the mid-1990's.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Red eyed crocodile skinks are fairly small skinks that can range from about 6.0 to 9.5 inches as adults in total snout-to-tail length. Snout to vent length ranges from 3.1 to 3.9 inches (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial and Semi-Aquatic. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Red eyed crocodile skinks can be adequately housed in a 20 gallon long terrarium, or similar sized enclosure. Red eyed crocodile skinks do best when housed individually and separately, as males will fight and females may be territorial. This species require relatively high humidity as well. Provide these skinks with substrates that enable burrowing as well as the ability to meet these humidity levels such as, coconut fiber, cypress mulch, organic leaf litter-topsoil, and sphagnum moss mixture. Provide sufficient and ample hiding areas and live planted or artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. Provide a large, shallow bowl or dish of fresh water as well for soaking and raising humidity and change or clean it frequently or whenever dirtied. Misting once to twice weekly will also help maintain high relative humidity at around 70 to 95%. An automatic or timed mister or fogger can also be used. If using an entire, or partially screened enclosure, higher humidity will need to be met by adding one or more panels of Plexiglas while still enabling adequate ventilation.

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 these skinks range from 70 to 75 degrees F on the cool side and no more than 80 to 85 degrees F on the warm, basking side. These skinks are primarily crepuscular, and do not necessarily require overhead UVA/UVB incandescent and fluorescent lighting, although using such on a 12 to 14 hour day/night cycle can improve an enclosure's aesthetics. Also 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, red eyed crocodile skinks are primarily insectivorous, meaning they will eat insects, arachnids, worms, and other invertebrates, as well as occasionally other small vertebrates. In captivity, feed red eyed crocodile skinks a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, fruit fly cultures, or waxworms. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Red eyed crocodile 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 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

Red eyed crocodile skinks can be handled for short amounts of time, but in general, are not a species that tolerates frequent and/or prolonged handling. Frequent handling is therefore not recommended to prevent over stressing these skinks. Care should also be taken to not accidentally drop these animals when handling them. If provided the correct care, humidity, and setup, these skinks can be very active and personable species that are very unique and enjoyable for the intermediate level enthusiast to keep and maintain. Sometimes they may also "play dead" when handled 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

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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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