



*Cheryl Cousins

Steppe Runner *(Eremias arguta)*

Spunky Newcomers

Steppe Runners are small, terrestrial diurnal lizards that have only recently entered the pet trade within the last several years (2016 as of this article). Steppe runners are a primarily terrestrial lizard with a ground or base color of tan, light brown, to grayish brown with several rows of light colored dorsal spots and ocelli bordered in black. They occur in southeastern Europe, through western, southwestern, and west-central Asia. More specifically, steppe runners can occur from Turkey, through northeastern Romania, northern Iran, to southwestern Russia. They can also occur from southern Moldova and southern Ukraine, through other portions of southern Russia, and into northwestern China, among other Asian localities.

Relatively little more is currently known about the steppe runner's natural history and reproductive habits, but hopefully with increased keeping and familiarity with these personable lizard species will shed additional light on these spunky little lizards.

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

Superfamily: Lacertoidea

Family: Lacertidae

Subfamily: Lacertinae

Genus: Eremias

Species: *Eremias arguta**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Captive longevity is still uncertain, as steppe runners are still relatively new to the pet industry. If provided the proper care, steppe runners can probably attain longevity of at least 8 to 10 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The steppe runner is a relatively small, terrestrial species of lizard indigenous to southeastern Europe, through western, southwestern, and west-central Asia. More specifically, steppe runners can occur from Turkey, through northeastern Romania, northern Iran, to southwestern Russia. They can also occur from southern Moldova and southern Ukraine, through other portions of southern Russia, and into northwestern China, among other Asian localities. Within this range, steppe runner lizards occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-arboreal environments, including in a variety of semi-dry/semi-arid environments including semi-deserts, chaparral, grasslands, open woodlands, and even suburban areas, where they use burrows, rocks, logs, tree trunks, downed or low vegetation and other debris on or near the ground to thermoregulate, forage, and seek refuge.

Origin/History

Eremias arguta (Pallas, 1773).

Steppe runners are relatively new to the pet industry. They first appeared during about 2012, where most would be imported. However, imports would seem to disappear after several years, although they would breed well in captivity, and captive-bred specimens also became available.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner.

Size

Steppe runners are fairly small lizards that typically reach about 5.0 to 8.0 inches as adults in total snout-to-tail length. Maximum snout-to-vent length ranges from about 1.9 to 3.9 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling to juvenile steppe runners can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. They are active, diurnal lizards that require a minimum of a 20 to 30 gallon long terrarium or enclosure as adults. Multiple animals that are housed together must have accordingly larger accommodations, although males can be territorial towards one another, and should not be housed together. Steppe runners of all ages can be maintained on low humidity substrates including play sand mixtures, crushed walnut fibers, or similar substrates. For water, low humidity levels should be maintained, and a small, shallow water dish should be provided. Steppe runners can also be misted occasionally for additional hydration. Provide artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, slabs, crevices, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities for steppe runners as well.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Steppe runners 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 78 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and around 95 to 100 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 steppe runners 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. Steppe runners are lizards which require low levels of relative humidity, and they should be maintained at, or ideally within about 25 to 30%.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous; In the wild, steppe runners are primarily insectivores, eating insects and other invertebrates, although they will catch and consume other prey items as well such as smaller vertebrates, and some fruit and vegetable matter if available. In captivity, steppe runners can be fed a mostly insectivorous diet of many types of feeder insects (crickets, mealworms, waxworms, roaches, and superworms), as well as some greens, fruits and vegetables, and even occasionally pre-killed rodents of appropriate size, but feed them these sparingly, if at all. As with many lizards, steppe runners can become quite accustomed to human interaction, and can often become hand fed or will accept food from a bowl or dish. Providing calcium and vitamin D3 supplements or supplementation such as dusting in steppe runner diets is also essential for these lizard's 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

Steppe runners can be handled or restrained for short periods of time, but are not an overly hands on or handleable species, and can be subject to stress and/or possible injury if done so incorrectly. As with many smaller lizards, steppe runners may be active, and therefore care should be taken to avoid dropping or injuring them during handling.

****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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