



*Photo Credit: National Geographic.

Sulawesi Water Skink (*Tropidophorus baconii*)

Water Loving, and Prehistoric Looking!

Also known as the Bacon's skinks, spiny water skinks, or Bacon's Waterside skinks, the Sulawesi water skink is a species of large, semi-aquatic skink endemic to, or indigenous to the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia, as its name implies. They may also be found in the surrounding regions of Indochina, Borneo, and the Philippines as well. Relatively little is currently known about this species natural history or habitat preferences in the wild; however, it is generally currently believed that this unusual and unique species is largely semi-aquatic, spending much of its life in and around freshwater habitats within their ranges.

This species is also known to be sexually dimorphic in their sizes, with females typically being larger than males. They are a moderately to large sized species of skink, with large, heavy, overlapping osteoderms and scales similar to those of crocodilians, and also have stout, rudder-like tails to possibly aid in their ability to swim. This species generally has a large, broad head and short snouts, with large, dark eyes, with a darker black or brown broad stripe also running through their eyes. Their throats and lower jawlines tend to be lighter cream to whitish colored as well. Overall coloration of this species ranges from an earthy brown or blackish, to dark or muddy reddish or reddish brown in color. Young, or juvenile individuals also tend to have more pronounced pale orangish to cream colored banding as well.

The Sulawesi water skink can make for a very unique and personable species to maintain for the more intermediate level enthusiast, although most, if not all available remain wild-caught and collected animals. This species can become hardy under the correct conditions and setup, but can take time in order to become more acclimated, overall.

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: Tropidophorus

Species: *Tropidophorus baconii**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Captive, as well as wild longevity of this species is currently uncertain. However, If provided the proper care, Sulawesi water skinks can attain potential longevity of at least to 10 years, with maximum longevity being unknown at this time.

Distribution and Habitat

The Sulawesi water skink is a very unique, armored species of moderately to large sized skink indigenous to Sulawesi in Indonesia, as well as the surrounding regions of the Philippines, Indochina, and Borneo. Relatively little more is currently known about this species' preferred habitat usages, although they may utilize freshwater habitats within 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, as well as in and around the water.

Origin/History

Tropidophorus baconii Hikida, Riyanto & Ota, 2003. Named in honor of American herpetologist James Patterson Bacon, Jr. (1940–1986).

Sulawesi water skinks would be fairly inexpensive species to purchase, usually running about \$75 or less, but are not very common in the pet trade or herpetoculture. Not much specific information is available as to when these skinks first entered the hobby, or were kept, unfortunately. They would best be kept by somewhat experienced reptile enthusiasts.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Sulawesi water skinks are fairly large skinks that can range from up to 10.0 to 14.0 inches as adults in total snout-to-tail length. Being sexually dimorphic in their sizes, females are typically larger than males. Maximum snout-to-vent length is up to about 4.7 inches (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial and Semi-Aquatic. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. One, to a pair of Sulawesi water skinks can be adequately housed in at least a 40 gallon long terrarium, or similar sized enclosure. 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 fibers, organic top soils, cypress mulch, and sphagnum moss mixture. The substrate used should be able to retain moisture and humidity relatively well, but not become too soggy, and be well aerated and resistant to compaction. In addition to the substrate, an additional drainage layer underneath the substrate should also be used to retain any excess water as well.

Provide sufficient and ample hiding areas and live planted or artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. Being a semi-aquatic species, Sulawesi water skinks require either a large, shallow bowl, tub, or pan of fresh water (for ample swimming and raising opportunities, and which must be changed or cleaned frequently or whenever dirtied), or other dedicated water gradient or paludarium. Water must be kept relatively clean. Misting once to twice weekly will also help maintain high relative humidity at around 65 to 85%. 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. In general, this species should be given approximately half of its enclosure, or more, access to water, although drier basking areas should also still be provided. The water should be at least six (6) inches deep, to allow for swimming and submersion, and can be kept clean using a suitable filter and pump. Live and aquatic plants, both on dry areas and in their water, can also help provide added comfort and security for this species.

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 80 degrees F on the cool side and ambient temperatures, and no more than 80 to 85 degrees F on the warm, basking side. These skinks are primarily diurnal to crepuscular, but do still require overhead UVA/UVB incandescent and fluorescent lighting, and 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, Sulawesi water skinks are primarily insectivorous, meaning they will eat insects, arachnids, worms, and other invertebrates, as well as occasionally other small vertebrates. In captivity, feed Sulawesi water 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

Sulawesi water skinks can be handled for short amounts of time, but in general, are not a species that tolerates frequent and/or prolonged handling. Initially, at least, handling should be kept to a minimum to allow for them to adjust and acclimate. Frequent handling can stress this species, especially if they are newly or recently acquired imports, and 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, and sufficient time to adjust and acclimate, these skinks can become calmer and more handleable over time. They aren't, however, usually an overly aggressive species prone to biting, but can still be a quick-moving species.

****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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