



*Photo Credit: Kevin Wells

Yellow Spotted Night Lizard (*Lepidophyma flavimaculatum*)

The Real “Yellow Spotted” Lizards!

Also known as the yellow spotted tropical night lizard, or sometimes erroneously the “Nicaraguan alligator lizard”, the yellow spotted night lizard is a very unique species of primarily nocturnal to crepuscular, primarily terrestrial (or ground dwelling) species of lizard belonging to the night lizard family, and which is indigenous to the moist and wet, tropical forests and woodlands throughout much of Central America from Costa Rica, to Panama. These lizards are rather secretive species, preferring to remain concealed during the daytime underneath forest floor logs, leaf litter, or other forest floor debris, although they may also climb amongst low tree trunks or loose bark of trees as well. Another even more unique adaptation of these lizards are that they are known to be able to reproduce parthenogenetically, giving birth to already fully developed young.

As their name implies, these lizards usually range in color from dark reddish-brown, to dark brown, to black with large, pale yellowish to orangish, or cream colored spots interspaced along both sides of their bodies, while their dorsums are usually duller than their ventral surfaces, or bellies. These lizards also have numerous, small dorsal spine like tubercles, giving them a rough textured appearance, and their heads are relatively large, narrow, and plated. Their bellies, or ventrals and tails are conversely covered in wide, overlapping banded plating as well. For those who may be familiar with the Disney movie “Holes”, the “yellow spotted” lizards used in the film were simply harmless bearded dragons (*Pogona vitticeps*) with yellow spots painted onto them. However, while the equally harmless yellow spotted night lizards are much less commonly kept, this unique and enjoyable species has nonetheless been making headway in popularity among more intermediate to advanced enthusiasts looking for that next unique lizard species!

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Diploglossa

Family: Xantusiidae

Genus: *Lepidophyma*

Species: *Lepidophyma flavimaculatum*
*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

While the captive and wild longevity of these lizards is still uncertain, if provided the proper care, these lizards can attain potential longevity of at least 10 to 12 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat

Yellow spotted night lizards are rather widely distributed over much of Central America, from central Mexico and Costa Rica, through Nicaragua, Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Panama, where they may occupy coastal and higher inland subtropical forests and woodlands. Within this range, they are rather secretive, semi-fossorial species, seeking refuge and thermoregulating under forest floor rocks, rotting logs, leaf litter, and other forest floor debris, although they may also climb up into low tree trunks, and loose, standing bark within these microhabitats as well. These lizards are moderately to highly microhabitat specialists in these habitats.

Origin/History

Lepidophyma flavimaculatum A.H.A. Duméril, 1851.

As is the case with so many species over the years, yellow-spotted night lizards were once imported in large numbers and available very cheaply at many herp shows and pet stores. The author remembers individuals priced as low as US \$5 each at times. After mass importation all but ceased, *L. flavimaculatum* became rare and difficult to obtain in the US. Unfortunately, a cheap price tag and ready availability often causes a given species to be underappreciated by many, or often inappropriately considered first time pets for children. A few dedicated hobbyists however, notably Jim McDermont, appreciated the uniqueness of this species and worked to keep them available in the hobby.

Today *L. flavimaculatum* can usually be found with patience and diligent searching. Specialized groups on the internet can allow for networking with private breeders. Although not terribly expensive compared to high end herps, one can expect to pay significantly more than \$5 for an individual now (Foster Reves 2021).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Somewhat Advanced.

Size

Adult yellow spotted night lizards are sexually dimorphic, and can vary somewhat in size depending on the gender. This species generally reaches about 4.0 to about 6.0 inches snout to vent length for most adults (SVL). Total snout-to-tail length ranges from about 8.2 to 11.4 inches snout-to-tail length.

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial to Semi-Fossorial. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling to juvenile yellow spotted night lizards can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult lizards of this species require at least a 15 to 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure for a pair, although for a single adult, a 10 gallon or equivalent sized enclosure will also suffice. Hatchling and adult lizards alike can be maintained on a loose substrate that allows for burrowing that can retain moderate levels of moisture and humidity, and can include sphagnum moss, coconut fibers, sphagnum and fir mixtures, cypress mulch, orchid bark, or chemical free potting soil.

Provide a large, shallow dish of clean water for them to be able to readily enter and exit, and change and clean it every several days, or sooner if fouled. Misting them at least once to twice weekly with lukewarm water for 15 to 20 minutes can also help raise their hydration and humidity as well, and this species will frequently drink the water droplets in this manner. Also be sure to provide ample basking and hiding opportunities in the form of live or artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, cork bark or tubes, or other logs and decor. These lizards will enjoy sufficient burrowing opportunities, and will also climb if provided structures for them to do so in their enclosure as well.

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 lizards range from 70 to 75 degrees F from the cool side/ambient temperature to the warm, basking side. Nighttime temperatures can be allowed to drop to 65 to 70 degrees F. 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. 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 yellow spotted night lizards in captivity, although they do not require high amounts of UVB. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can still 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. These unique lizards should be maintained at relatively moderate to higher humidity levels overall ranging from at, or within 70 to 85%, which may also vary depending on the exact conditions.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; In the wild, yellow spotted night lizards are primarily insectivorous, meaning they will eat a variety of insects, arthropods, and other invertebrates. They may also eat eggs, and smaller vertebrates as well such as small rodents, birds, or other reptiles if they can locate and access them.

In captivity, feed these lizards a primarily insectivorous diet of a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, and waxworms. They can also be given pre-killed rodents on occasion, but provide these sparingly, if at all. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. These lizards 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. Their 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

Yellow spotted night lizards, and other members of the night lizard family in general, are generally not the most handleable lizards, and may attempt to claw, squirm, or bite if handled or restrained too roughly. They can also become easily overstressed from prolonged or repeated handling attempts as well. Night lizards overall are a more hands-off species to maintain. As with any animal though, care should be taken to avoid dropping or overly restraining them to

prevent injury if they are to be handled for any length of time.

****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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