**CARE GUIDE**

**BLUE TONGUE SKINK**

Ontario Reptile Rescue

www.ontarioreptilerescue.ca

info@ontarioreptilerescue.ca

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| Common Name | Blue Tongue Skink  The most common skinks kept as a pet are Eastern Blue Tongue Skinks and Northern Blue Tongue Skinks. Some Indonesian blue tongue skinks have entered the pet trade through the importation of wild-caught animals. Captive-bred subspecies should always be the first choice when adopting a blue tongue skink to deter the unethical practice of selling wild-caught animals. There are plenty of skinks that can be found in the pet trade, be sure to properly identify your subspecies to make sure you are following the correct care guide. |
| Scientific Name | *Tiliqua scincoides scindoides* (Eastern Blue Tongue Skink)  *Tiliqua scincoides intermedia* (Northern Blue Tongue Skink)  *Tiliqua gigas* (Indonesian Blue Tongue Skink) |
| Average Size | Length: 38 - 61cm (15” - 24”) Weight: 283 - 510g |
| Average Lifespan | 15 – 20 years on average, but may live 35+ years with proper care and husbandry. |
| Oldest in Captivity (if known) | Unknown |
| Natural Range | Australia, some parts of Indonesia, New Guinea  Australian blue tongue skinks kept in captivity are typically captive bred animals. Indonesian blue tongue skinks kept in captivity are often wild caught and exported animals. |
| Temperament | Curious, outgoing, docile |
| Behaviour | These lizards are known to be quite smart and curious. In their natural habitat, they frequently burrow, or may throw dirt on themselves while basking. Despite their short legs, some keepers have noted that they do enjoy climbing short  When they feel threatened, they will open their mouths to display their blue tongues. If your skink does this, it is best to give them space to calm down and try interacting with them another time. |
| Cohabitation | Blue tongue skinks are very territorial and should not be housed together. Both males and females of this species will fight each other, resulting in serious injury and/or death. |
| Activity Level | Diurnal (most active during the day) |
| Conservation Status | IUCN - Least Concern  Despite blue tongue skinks not being endangered or vulnerable, there are still some skinks that are wild exports. If purchasing a blue tongue skink, make sure you are supporting a breeder who only breeds and sells captive bred skinks to prevent this species from depleting in the wild, and to stop the support of the illegal pet trade. |
| Enclosure Size | The minimum enclosure size for a Blue Tongue Skink is **4’X2’X2’.**  Being a terrestrial species means these reptiles require a lot of floor space to be able to move around and carry out their natural behaviours. Enclosure decor should include a minimum of two hides and real or fake plants to allow the animal to feel secure. Some blue tongue skinks may enjoy climbing, low level climbing opportunities such as half cork rounds, logs, or stones should be included as well. |
| Enclosure Materials | Glass: difficult to maintain temperatures and humidity. Has a reflective  surface that can stress animals out. Heavy, difficult to move, and easy to  break. Difficult to find in large sizes, or may be very expensive.  Wood: heavy, difficult to move. Easier to maintain temperatures and  humidity than glass. Needs to be sealed or it will rot.  PVC: light-weight, easy to move. Best material to maintain temperatures  and humidity. Does not rot, can seal seams to hold water. More expensive.  There are different grades of PVC that affect its ability to  bend/warp/deform, resist scratching, etc; you get what you pay for when it  comes to PVC. |
| Temperature Range | The temperature range needed can vary based on whether your skink is the Australian or Indonesian subspecies. It is important to know the subspecies of your blue tongue skink to ensure proper husbandry. Both subspecies require a horizontal temperature gradient, which means one end of the enclosure will have a higher temperature with a basking spot, while the other side of the enclosure is a “cool” side to allow the animal to thermoregulate as needed.  **Australian Blue Tongue Skink: 21-29C** (70 - 80F)  - Basking Surface Temperature: 40 - 46C (105 - 115F)  **Indonesian Blue Tongue Skink: 24 - 29C** (75 - 85F)  - Basking Surface Temperature: 38 - 41C (100 - 105F) |
| Humidity Range | Just like the temperature, the required humidity levels vary based on subspecies.  **Australian Blue Tongue Skink: 40 - 60%**  **Indonesian Blue Tongue Skink: 60 - 80%**  A great way to tell if your humidity levels have been high enough for your skink is to feel the scales on their belly! A well hydrated skink will have very smooth belly scales, whereas rough scales mean you may need to boost humidity levels in the enclosure. |
| Lighting | Being diurnal animals, blue tongue skinks require a day/night cycle to maintain their circadian rhythm and to allow them to bask during the day. A 12 hour day/night cycle is recommended.  Adding LED lighting alongside basking or halogen lights is a great way to provide full spectrum lighting for a diurnal species without interfering with enclosure temperatures. Brands such as ExoTerra and Arcadia create LED bars that can be placed on top of the enclosure that also support plant growth for keepers choosing to create a bioactive environment for their reptile. |
| Heating | The wattage of bulbs used to obtain the required temperatures for this species will vary based on the temperature of your home. Overhead heating should be used to mimic how heat radiates down from the sun. Halogen bulbs are a great daytime heat source, but should be used with a dimming thermostat to make sure the skink does not overheat in the basking zone. If additional heat or nighttime heat is required, a deep heat projector can help raise the ambient temperature of the enclosure without giving off light that would disrupt the animal’s sleep cycle. |
| UVB | This species are found between Ferguson Zone 2 and 3, which means they are between being an occasional basker and an open sun basker. They require a UVI index of **1.1 - 3.0**, with the highest UV exposure located in their designated basking spot. A medium to high level UVB bulb should be used to allow for proper basking behaviours. Depending on the distance the animal will be from the UVB, the percentage of your UVB may need to differ. For example, Arcadia recommends their 12% T5 UVB bulb if the distance between the reptile and the UVB will be between 15” - 24”, however for enclosures that are not as tall, a 6% T5 UVB bulb is better suited.  UVB is essential for the proper synthesis of vitamin D in reptiles, which helps them use calcium for many vital functions. Improper use of UVB (such as using a fixture that does not have a high enough UV output or is not a fluorescent tube fixture) can result in the development of MBD, a frequently life threatening bone disease found in reptiles that do not have access to calcium and/or UVB while kept in captivity. |
| Substrate | A naturalistic substrate is best as it allows this species to engage in natural burrowing behaviours. **Substrate should be 4 - 6” deep** to allow the skink to dig. A deeper substrate will also assist with humidity.  The best materials to make a naturalistic substrate depends on the subspecies of your skink.  **Australian:** A semi-arid mix is required, due to their lower humidity requirement. You can either purchase a pre-made desert species soil, or create your own by using 60% organic topsoil and 40% play sand\*.  **Indonesian:** A tropical, or humid mix is needed to support the higher humidity requirements for this subspecies. There are plenty of tropical pre-made mixes, most of which contain coconut fiber that helps hold moisture. To make your own mix, combine plain organic topsoil, coconut fiber, and a small amount of play sand. Spagnum moss and/or leaf litter can be used in the substrate to further help raise the humidity if needed.  \*If you choose to make your own substrate for your reptile, you must use organic topsoil and play sand as these are free of chemicals, pesticides, or other potential contaminants that can harm your pet. Make sure to purchase from a reliable source. |
| Handling | Once a skink has adjusted to its new home, they adapt well to human interaction and handling. When handling, be sure to gentle scoop up the animal and support all of the skink’s legs so they feel safe. Never pick up a skink by their tail or head, as this is very stressful for the animal and may result in serious injury to the reptile. |
| Feeding | Most keepers make salads for their blue tongue skink. Salads allow you to create a balanced diet in each meal fed to your pet. Thoroughly mixing food items together can help prevent the skink from picking out only want they want to eat. Some skinks will do everything they can to avoid eating their veggies!  Juvenile blue tongue skinks should be fed daily, whereas adults can be fed once every 2 - 3 days. Juvenile skinks should consume mostly meat/protein, whereas greens should make up most of their diet once they are older. Skinks are known to love their food, so be sure to not overfeed.  Fresh water should always be available. A large, shallow water bowl is best. Water should be replenished daily. If using tap water, make sure that the water is treated with a reptile safe water conditioner to prevent the reptile from drinking any chemicals used to treat the water. Otherwise, spring water can be used. Distilled water should never be used as a source of drinking water for reptiles. |
| Diet | Blue tongue skinks are **omnivores**. They require a varied diet that consists of meat and vegetables to ensure their nutritional needs are met. A general guideline of how to create a balanced diet for your skink are below:   * **50% vegetables or greens**   Ex: collard greens, dandelion greens, mustard greens, carrots, zucchini, etc. Avoid lettuces (very low nutritional value), kale (high phosphorous levels, which can be dangerous to reptiles in high amounts), and avocado (toxic to reptiles).  **- 40% meat or protein**  Ex: Grain-free, high-quality canned cat or dog food (cat food is best for blue tongue skinks under a year old, dog food is best once their age exceeds one year), canned snails, raw quail eggs, crickets, silkworms, hornworms, etc.   * **10% fruits**   Ex: Blueberries, mangos, strawberries, apples, etc. Avoid citrus fruits as well as tomatoes.  Based on these numbers, you can see that fruits should only be given as occasional treats or snacks. Vegetables should make up the majority of their diet, with protein close behind. Proteins may come from meats, but feeding live insects can also contribute to this category. Before feeding anything new to your skink, be sure to research whether the food item is safe for them to consume. |
| Multivitamin + supplements | When adding additional vitamins to your skinks diet, make sure that you check the nutritional value of any prepared diets being given to your reptile. Many cat or dog foods will not need an additional multivitamin added, and this could be dangerous in some instances. Any multivitamins used should be included on a rotational basis, for example, 1 to 2 times per week.  Calcium powder should be added to every feeding to maintain healthy bones and to prevent the development of metabolic bone disease. Make sure that the calcium powder does not contain D3, as the skink will produce their own D3 by basking under their UVB bulb. |

The information in this care guide is based on both practical experience as well as research papers published by reputable sources. Reptile husbandry is constantly evolving as we learn more about these remarkable creatures, never rely on one source for information and always strive to learn more.