



Western New York Herpetological Society

www.wnyherp.org

Common Name: Blue-Tongue Skink

Latin name: *Tiliqua* spp.

Native to: Australia, New Guinea and Tasmania

Size: Can be anywhere from seven to 24 inches in length depending on specific species. Please see below for more information.

Life span: Most specimens can reach ages of 20 years or more in captivity

General appearance: All blue-tongue skinks tend to have a heavy build with small legs and toes. They also exhibit the typical triangular blunt head of most skinks. All species get their name from a bright blue tongue in their pink or red mouths. Specific differences among various species are found below:

T. adelaidensis - Pygmy Blue-Tongue Skink: Typically found in Southern Australia and Tasmania. This species will generally only reach lengths of seven inches or less. They are a highly endangered species with an estimated wild population of only 5,500. They vary in color from light grey to very dark brown with irregular black spots along the back.

T. gigas - New Guinea Blue Tongue Skink: This species is generally grey or grey-brown with narrow dark bands of irregular shape across the back. *T. gigas* is one of the largest species of blue-tongue skink and can reach lengths of 24 inches. They can be found in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Jobi, Admiralty Islands, New Britain and the Bismarck Archipelago. This species is omnivorous and will feed on wildflowers, fruit, small animals and insects.

T. gerrardii - Australian Pink Tongued Skink: Typically found in New South Wales, Eastern Australia and is generally 15 to 18 inches in length. This species generally nocturnal in the warmer weather and becomes diurnal in colder weather. Their natural environment is generally wetter than most other species. It feeds almost exclusively on snails and slugs. The classification of this species is still being debated. The WNYHS uses ISIS as a standard for all scientific names and it is still classified in *Tiliqua* at the time of this writing.

T. mustifaciata - Central Blue-Tongued Skink: Can be found in both desert and tropical environments in North Territory, Queensland, South Australia and West Australia. They will grow to 15 to 18 inches in length and will feed on wildflowers, small animals and insects.

T. nigrolutea - Blotched Blue Tongued Skink or Black and Yellow Blue-Tongued Skink: Generally found in Southern Australia and Tasmania. This species is typically brown-black with a yellow colored irregular spotted or striped pattern. One of the larger species it can reach sizes of 24 inches in length. Like most skinks this species is omnivorous. This species is often crossed with *T. scincoides* in the pet trade and the offspring are not sterile and still viable for breeding.

T. occipitalis - Western Blue Tongued Skink: This is a short tailed, compact species reaching lengths of about 20 inches. They are generally reddish brown with lighter tan cross banding and a tan belly. This species is also omnivorous and likes various berries, spiders and other insects and arthropods. The Western Blue Tongued Skink can generally be found in New South Wales, North Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and West Australia.

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T. rugosa – Shingleback Skink: Generally found in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and West Australia. They can reach sizes of up to 15 inches in length. They get their name from their large keeled scales. They are generally brown-black in color with lighter bands across the back. Recent research also suggests that this species is monogamous.

T. scincoides scincoides – Common or Eastern Blue-Tongued Skink: Can often be found in semi-desert to agricultural areas of most of eastern Australia and the upper third of the Northern Territory, far northern Western Australia, and southeastern South Australia. They can reach sizes of up to 24 inches in length but generally reach lengths of only 18 inches. This species is generally tan with darker uniform or semi-broken bands or blotches across the body that becomes more blotched on the tail. Some specimens have a dark stripe from the back of the head to the eye. Legs are usually grey and unmarked. The most distinguishable feature, and the easiest way to separate this subspecies from the Northern, or Irian Jaya localities, is the presence of thin dark stripes lengthwise along the body. This species is also omnivorous feeding on small animals, insects and plant material. This is one of the hardier and popular species found in the pet trade.

T. s. intermedia – Northern Blue Tongued Skink: This subspecies prefers tropical or savannah woodlands of Northern Australia. Often considered the largest of the blue-tongued skinks it can reach lengths of 24 to 27 inches. It generally has uniform vertical bands which are usually chestnut colored, with orange shaded off-centered markings on the sides. As with the Eastern, the legs are grey and unmarked. Because of their gentler demeanor this subspecies generally makes for the best choice if you want a handleable pet.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure: Most hatchlings can be kept in a 10-gallon aquarium. Full sized adults should be kept in 40 to 55-gallon aquariums or similar enclosures.

Temperature: A temperature gradient of 75° – 85° F should be established with a basking area of 90° – 95° F during the day. Temperatures should not fall below 70° F at night.

Heat/Light: Temperatures can be maintained with basking bulbs, infrared heat bulbs, and ceramic emitters or under tank heaters and panels. Hot rocks should never be used due to the high risk of burns that can be inflicted on the animal from malfunctioning heat rocks. As with most diurnal species full spectrum light is required. This can be achieved by using special fluorescent bulbs or newer Active UV bulbs. Active UV bulbs also provide heat which may allow you to not have to provide additional heat sources.

Substrate: Wood shavings (avoid cedar or pine as these may cause long term health issues), newspaper or indoor/outdoor carpeting can all be used as substrates.

Environment: Most species available in the pet trade are ground dwellers and do not require many rocks or branches for climbing. A hide box should be provided for the animal as well as a portion of the enclosure maintained with slightly damp substrate such as sphagnum moss to provide a humidity chamber to help with shedding.

Diet: Most species are omnivorous (eating both plant and animal matter). Generally a diet consisting of 60% plant and 40% animal will provide a healthy mix for your animal. Frozen mixed vegetables, various greens, small amounts of high quality dog food, crickets, mealworms, and thawed pre-killed frozen mice can all be fed to your skink. Fresh water should be provided daily.

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Maintenance: The enclosure should be spot cleaned daily. A thorough cleaning should be performed on a regular basis. A 5% bleach solution is an excellent disinfectant. Be sure to thoroughly rinse the enclosure before replacing the substrate and placing the lizard back in the enclosure

Other references or recommended reading:

Loose, Craig. "The Blue Tongue Pages." Updated December 8, 2002. Retrieved March 7, 2003.

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Kaplan, Melissa. "Blue-Tongue Skinks." 2000. Retrieved March 7, 2003.

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<<http://www.geocities.com/rainforest/5463/blueto1.html>>

Weis, Peter. "The Care of Blue-Tongued Skinks." Retrieved March 7, 2003

<<http://www.homestead.com/PSReptiles/BluetonguedSkinks~main.html>>