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Alligator Lizards *(Elgaria sp.)* and *(Gerrhonotus sp.)*

Surly Lizards with an Attitude

Alligator lizards of the United States and Mexico comprise of approximately two to three genera of primarily diurnal (active during the day) and terrestrial lizards. They earn their name "alligator" lizards from their large, keeled dorsal and lateral scalation and osteoderms which lends to them resembling alligators, or other crocodilians. These lizards can be quite variable in color depending on the species, but generally have a brown, yellowish, gray, to greenish-yellow or olive brown ground color with several (up to 9 to 13) darker dorsal and lateral crossbands present. Alligator lizards also have somewhat thickened, elongated bodies with reduced limbs, flat, wedge shaped heads, keeled scales on the dorsum, sides, and legs, and distinct skin folds along their sides. These lizards also use their somewhat elongated bodies to move via lateral undulation through the substrate and vegetation. As with many other lizard species, alligator lizards can also drop their tails through caudal autotomy, which momentarily startles and/or distracts the potential predator long enough for the lizard to make an escape. A new tail regenerates after several weeks, although it is somewhat more vestigial than the original. Alligator lizards can be a pugnacious genera of lizards when disturbed, often hissing, gaping, and inflating their bodies to appear larger, and may also bite if more closely provoked. Nevertheless, alligator lizards can make for hardy and undemanding pet lizards with big personalities that are sure to not disappoint!

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: Anguidae
Subfamily: Gerrhonotinae
Genus: Elgaria and Gerrhonotus
Species: *Elgaria sp.** and *Gerrhonotus sp.**
**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity
If provided the proper care, alligator lizards can attain potential longevity of 10 to 15 years or more in captivity.

Species
The genus Gerrhonotus consists of five species, including: the Farr's alligator lizard (*G. farri*), Texas alligator lizard (*G. infernalis*), smooth headed alligator lizard (*G. liocephalus*), Lugo's alligator lizard (*G. lugoi*), and pygmy alligator lizard (*G. parvus*). The genus Elgaria, or the Western alligator lizards includes: *E. cedrosensis* (no common name), northern alligator lizard (*E. coerula*), Madrean alligator lizard (*E. kingii*), southern alligator lizard (*E. multicarinata*), Panimint alligator lizard (*E. panamintina*), San Lucan alligator lizard (*E. paucicarinata*), and *E. velazquezi* (no common name).

Distribution and Habitat
Alligator lizards are relatively small to medium sized anguid lizards consisting of two genera, and twelve species collectively in North America, ranging from northern Mexico and the south central United States (*Gerrhonotus sp*.) to the coastal-Pacific western United States from central California to southern British Columbia in Canada (*Elgaria sp*.). They may be found in a variety of semi-dry/semi-arid environments including semi-deserts, chaparral, grasslands, open woodlands, and even suburban areas.

Conservation Status
Conservation status is dependent upon the species. Some may be IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC), Vulnerable (VU), Endangered (EN), or Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

Experience Level Required
Novice/Beginner.

Size
Adult alligator lizards can vary in size depending on the species from 7 to 14 inches. Some species can reach larger sizes of up to 24 inches or slightly more.

Housing and Enclosure
Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling to juvenile alligator lizards can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult alligator lizards require a minimum of a 20 to 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Hatchling and adult alligator lizards can be maintained on a loose substrate that allows for burrowing that can retain some levels of moisture and humidity, and can include sphagnum moss, sphagnum and fir mixtures, cypress mulch, orchid bark, or chemical free potting soil. Provide a large, shallow dish of clean water, 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. Provide ample basking and hiding opportunities by providing artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs.

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 80 degrees F on the cool side/ambient temperature and around 85 to 90 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Nighttime temperatures can be allowed to drop to 65 to 75 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. Ideal temperatures for bearded dragons range from 80 to 85 degrees F on the cool side and around 100 to 112 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 alligator lizards 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.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; In the wild, alligator lizards are primarily insectivorous, meaning they will eat a variety of insects and other invertebrates. They may also eat eggs, and smaller vertebrates as well such as small rodents, birds, or other reptiles.

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

When first captured or handled, alligator lizards can be known to be quite pugnacious, and able to deliver a surprisingly strong bite. With regular time, handling, and interaction, however, these lizards can become quite tame and accustomed to being hand fed and short periods of handling, but are still not an overly hands on pet lizard genera. As with any animal though, care should be taken to avoid dropping or overly restraining them to prevent injury.

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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