



\*Nyann Plummer

## Blue Tongued Skink (*Tiliqua sp.*)

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### **Blue Tongued Best Friends**

Blue tongued skinks belong to a genus of large, primarily terrestrial skinks which are named for their thick fleshy blue tongues that are displayed as a warning or for defensive displays. Blue tongued skinks are large, smooth scaled skinks ranging from tan, cream colored, gray, to light brown with large brown, reddish brown, to orangish dorsal bands and stripes. These large skinks also have a large, broad head, tiny legs, and characteristic thick fleshy blue tongue. Several species and subspecies are commonly seen and available in the pet industry. They include the Irian Jaya Blue Tongued Skink (*Tiliqua sp.*), Northern Blue Tongued Skink (*Tiliqua intermedia*), and Eastern Blue Tongued Skink (*Tiliqua scincoides*). Blue tongue skinks have, and still are rapidly becoming very popular, docile, and personable mid-sized lizard pets as more species, subspecies, localities, and even color morphs are becoming available in the herpetocultural hobby and industry.

### **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

**Subfamily:** Lygosominae

**Genus:** *Tiliqua*

**Species:** *Tiliqua sp.*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, blue tongued skinks can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

Most species of blue tongue skinks are found on mainland Australia and some on New Guinea, where they occupy a variety of habitats including semi-desert, scrubland, savannahs, grasslands, and rocky steppes.

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## **Conservation Status**

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

## **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner.

## **Size**

Blue tongued skinks are medium sized to large species of skinks that can range from about 6 to 9 inches as hatchlings. They average about 15 to 24 inches as adults, which can depend on the species, locality, and sex of the animal. Some species can become slightly larger as well.

## **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling blue tongue skinks can be housed in a 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adults require a minimum of a 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Provide blue tongued skinks with substrates that enable burrowing such as aspen chip shavings, cypress mulch, or orchid bark. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. Provide a bowl or dish of fresh water to help provide and maintain adequate hydration and humidity. Blue tongued skinks are terrestrial, and do not require tall, or arboreal enclosures.

## **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 blue tongued skinks range from 75 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and 80 to 85 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Provide a basking spot of around 90 to 95 degrees. 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 blue tongued skinks 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**

***Omnivorous***; In the wild, blue tongued skinks are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. These large skinks will feed on a variety of insects, snails, slugs, and other gastropods, worms, other invertebrates, as well as the occasional small rodent, smaller reptiles, or other smaller animals they can capture and consume. In captivity, feed blue tongued skinks in captivity a mixed assortment of chopped up vegetables including carrots, peas, collard, mustard, and dandelion greens, and beans. Several commercially available omnivore mix diets are also available. They will also eat a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Blue tongued 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. 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

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recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

### **Handling**

As with many reptiles, hatchling and juvenile blue tongued skinks typically tend to be initially more nervous and nippy. Handle your skink gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most adult blue tongued skinks will settle down considerably and become quite docile and personable pets to keep.

\*\*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 the Madison Area Herpetological Society at [info@madisonherps.org](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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