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Brown Tree Climber or Mop Headed Iguana

(Uranoscodon superciliosus)

Mop Headed and Mesmerizing!

Also known as the Diving Lizard, and Mop Headed Iguana, the Brown Tree Climber is a medium-sized to relatively large species of iguanid lizard indigenous to a wide range within northern South America. As with many other iguanids, the brown tree climber is largely arboreal to semi-arboreal, often basking on shrubbery overhanging or near water, where they will drop down into while either submerging themselves or swimming to safety elsewhere when threatened. They earn one of their common names of mop-headed iguanas due to their unusual brows atop their eyes and relatively large, rounded heads. Color typically ranges from grayish to grayish-brown with darker, irregular markings along the body and tail, and a wider, irregular reddish to reddish brown or otherwise darker lateral stripe or band along each side of the lizard. A low nuchal crest and ridge of spines is also present from the back of the head and neck, along their dorsum. Brown tree climbers can be occasionally seen in the pet trade, but captive breeding remains somewhat infrequent. These lizards can make for unique, docile, and personable pets, however.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Iguania

Family: Tropicuridae

Genus: *Uranoscodon*

Species: *Uranoscodon superciliosus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Longevity in the wild and captivity is not yet fully understood, but captive brown tree climbers can be expected to attain longevity of at least 5 to 10 years or potentially more.

Distribution and Habitat

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Brown tree climbers are indigenous to the tropical to sub-tropical rainforests, forests, and woodlands, as well as savannahs over much of northern South America, including Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Suriname, Guyana, Colombia, and Venezuela. They are often found in or near wetlands and other bodies of fresh water including rivers and streams, marshes, and other flooded wetlands.

Conservation Status

Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

Legal and Regulatory Status(*Subject to Change)

Consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Adult sizes for Brown tree climbers varies depending on the exact species, as well as sex and age of the animal. Mop headed iguanas are most often 15 to 24 inches as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling or juvenile brown tree climbers can be housed in a 20 gallon tall terrarium or enclosure. A single adult mop headed iguana can be maintained in a minimum of a 40 gallon “tall” front or top opening terrarium. These lizards can be housed together in pairs of the same species, but increasingly larger housing should be provided accordingly. Adult males should not be housed together however as they are territorial. For substrate, these lizards will require a medium that can retain higher humidity such as pesticide free potting soil, cypress mulch, coconut husk bedding, orchid bark, or sphagnum moss. Hatchlings, juveniles, and adults should be misted or soaked in lukewarm water at least 2 to 3 times weekly for hydration and humidity. A large, shallow water bowl or dish should also be provided and be changed and cleaned regularly. Many of the commercially available misters or foggers can also help maintain adequate hydration for these lizards as well since they will also acquire much of their hydration from the moisture and condensation on their bodies as well as surrounding vegetation. Brown tree climbers are arboreal lizards that will appreciate added climbing, basking, and hiding opportunities. Provide vertical and horizontal artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, logs or branches and other perches. A variety of live or planted vivarium plants and/or mosses can also make an enclosure more aesthetically pleasing, as well as provide additional naturalistic basking and hiding areas, and help raise and maintain humidity levels these lizards require at about 80 to 95% overall.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Brown tree climbers originate from cooler, mountain or higher altitude areas, and this natural history should be considered when providing basking and ambient heating temperatures for them. For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure. Ideal ambient and cool side temperatures for brown tree climbers range from 75 to 85 degrees F and approximately 85 to 90 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Under tank heating pads, ceramic heat emitters, and/or infrared bulbs will help maintain adequate ambient temperatures. Exceeding these basking temperatures by much more will not be tolerated by these lizards, which may become heat stressed as a result. Relatively cooler temperatures and high humidity are key to maintaining brown tree climbers. Nighttime temperatures can be allowed to drop to 65 to 75 degrees F. These lizards require the proper amounts of overhead full spectrum UVA/UVB

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incandescent and linear or compact fluorescent lighting to do well. A day and night photoperiod or light cycle of 10 to 12 hours should also be given. 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 Omnivorous; In the wild, Brown tree climbers are primarily insectivorous, although they will eat both plant and animal matter and can be omnivorous. They will eat an assortment of insects and other invertebrates, fruit and vegetable material, and even other small vertebrates on occasion. In captivity, brown tree climbers will readily accept a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects including but not limited to crickets, mealworms, superworms, feeder roaches, and waxworms. Gut load these prey items by feeding them commercially available diets for added nutritional value. Brown tree climbers may also accept other prey items such as small pre-killed rodents, earthworms, redworms, and feeder goldfish or other small feeder fish, but feed them these sparingly. Brown tree climbers can be given these food items from a securely fastened arboreal perch or dish daily to every other day. Gutloading insect food items and providing sufficient calcium, multivitamin, and vitamin D3 supplements in these lizard's diets helps raise their nutritional value and should be used to supplement the diets of any age or size of animals whenever possible. Without the proper diet and amounts of nutrients and supplementation, all iguana species can be very susceptible to Metabolic Bone Disease (or MBD), a debilitating bone and growth disorder, other health and nutritional maladies, or even death in extremely severe cases. 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

As with many reptiles, younger, or hatchling brown tree climbers often tend to be, at least initially, more nervous, skittish, and defensive, but usually tend to become mild mannered and docile as adults, and can be readily handled or interacted with. Handle any age or size of brown tree climber gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most adult climbers will settle down considerably and become quite tame and personable pets to keep. They are overall are a mild mannered, personable, and highly enjoyable pet reptile species to maintain for any beginning to intermediate level reptile or amphibian enthusiast looking for a more unique animal.

****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

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