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Burton's/New Guinea Legless Lizard (*Lialis burtonis*)

Legless Oddities from Down Under

The Burton's legless lizard, also commonly known as the New Guinea legless lizard, is a unique species of medium sized to large legless lizard indigenous to much of continental Australia and portions of surrounding New Guinea. A cryptically colored and patterned species, the Burton's legless lizard lacks fore limbs, and only possesses a small, rudimentary set of hind legs which sometimes lend to the name of "flap footed lizards". These lizards are primarily active, crepuscular foragers and baskers, although they may be active during other times as well. These lizards have several unique methods of feeding, including acting as ambush predators and utilizing caudal luring with their tail tips to attract smaller prey. These legless lizards also lack eye-lids, and instead lick their eyes clean using their semi-forked tongues in a similar fashion to geckos, which these lizards are most closely related to. These lizards have very elongated, snake-like bodies and wide, flattened, angular heads. Color and pattern can vary considerably, ranging from bronze or copper, to reddish, brown or reddish brown, gray, or golden with some specimens being patternless, while others may have longitudinal stripes, spots, flecking, or other pattern variations. Burton's legless lizards are occasionally maintained in captivity, but tend to be obligate lizard feeders, making them enjoyable and unique species to maintain, but only for the more intermediate to advanced enthusiast.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Gekkota

Family: Pygopodidae

Genus: *Lialis*

Species: *Lialis burtonis**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

The Burton's legless lizard is relatively new to the pet trade, and the longevity for this species is

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still uncertain. As such, captive and wild longevity for this species is currently unknown.

Distribution and Habitat

Burton's legless lizards are indigenous to most of continental Australia and portions of New Guinea and surrounding islands except for portions of extreme southern Australia such as Tasmania. These lizards occupy the leaf litter and low vegetation of a variety of semi-arid to sub-tropical environments including semi-deserts, scrubland, savannahs, woodlands, forests, and rainforest margins.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

Size

As hatchlings and juveniles, Burton's legless lizards range from approximately 8 to 10 inches. As adults, they may reach up to 24 inches snout to vent length, and up to 36 inches or slightly more including their tails.

Housing and Enclosure

A medium sized to large, burrowing and fossorial species, Burton's legless lizards, as juveniles, can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon or larger secure, escape proof terrarium or enclosure that is also adequately ventilated. As adults, they require a minimum of a 40 gallon long terrarium or similar sized enclosure. Being a fossorial species, a particulate substrate that can retain moisture and humidity well, but not become overly wet or moist, or dry out too easily, should be provided. Suitable substrates for this species can include coconut bark or fibers, orchid bark, cypress mulch, or play sand mixtures. Provide at least 2 to 3 inches or more of substrate to enable burrowing. Additional furnishings that can be used for additional basking and hiding opportunities should include cork bark/flat hides, rocks, caves, log hides, or live or artificial plants, vines, and foliage. This species spends much of its time out of sight, but may come to the surface to bask under the correct conditions.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

For hydration and humidity, being a burrowing species, maintaining adequate moisture and humidity of the substrate is of more importance than ambient humidity, although this species in general requires higher humidity of 60 to 75%. When their substrate is kept adequately moistened, their need to drink is lessened, although a shallow water dish or bowl can also be provided at all times, and be changed regularly or whenever fouled. This species also tends to not be overly difficult to provide heating for as well. Provide a thermal gradient in the enclosure including adequate basking sites at a range from 70 to 75 degrees F for the ambient temperatures and cool side, and around 88 to 93 degrees F on the warm, basking end. Additional lighting can also be provided, and can probably benefit this species in providing additional UVA/UVB, calcium, and vitamin D3. Incandescent, or mercury vapor bulbs can also be used for overhead lighting and heating as well. 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

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Carnivorous; In the wild, Burton's legless lizards tend to be obligate lizard eaters, feeding primarily on smaller lizards, although other smaller reptiles and amphibians may also be consumed along with possibly insects and other invertebrates, and even small mammals or other smaller vertebrates.

In captivity, Burton's legless lizards seldom will accept pre-killed or frozen and thawed rodents of appropriate size, although these food items can be tried. These lizards much more often tend to be obligate lizard eaters, and can be provided feeder lizards of appropriate size such as feeder anoles or house geckos. Additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation can also be provided whenever needed. Overall 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

Burton's legless lizards, being a burrowing species, tend to not be an overly handleable species. Although they are not aggressive, and seldom bite in self-defense, they may squirm and writhe vigorously, and may also drop their tails when improperly handled. This is a species that should not be stressed from frequent or prolonged handling, as stress can lead to compromised health and shortened longevity for this species in captivity.

****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

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility.

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