



Eastern Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus undulatus*)

Hardy, North American “Blue Bellies”

Eastern fence lizards are small members of the large, diverse “spiny lizard” family. Their other common names often include the blue bellied lizards, prairie lizards/swift, or fence swifts. Their scales are heavily keeled, giving them a spiny texture and appearance. Males are usually more vibrantly colored than females or juveniles, and, during the breeding and reproductive season, develop vibrant blue throats, sides and ventral surfaces (or bellies). Fence lizards also will display a variety of social structure behaviors to signal territory, dominance, and courtship including arm waving, head bobbing, and/or pushups. Ground color typically ranges from grayish or brown with two rows of lighter white or cream colored dorso-lateral stripes interspaced with darker chevron shaped dorsal markings. As with many other lizards, fence lizards can also drop their tails through caudal autotomy when threatened or handled roughly, which temporarily startles and/or distracts the predator long enough for the lizard to make its escape. A new tail then regrows over several weeks, but tends to be more vestigial than the original. Fence lizards, although small, are bold, active, and personable little lizards that can make for very hardy, inexpensive, and satisfying pets for the beginning 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: Iguania

Family: Phrynosomatidae

Genus: *Sceloporus*

Species: *Sceloporus undulatus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, eastern fence lizards can attain longevity of 5 to 10 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The eastern fence lizard is a relatively small, arboreal to semi-arboreal spiny lizard indigenous to much of the eastern half of the United States. They may range from the central and south central,

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southeastern, eastern, and east-central United States, specifically. Within this range, eastern fence lizards occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-arboreal environments, including rocky, temperate to sub-tropical semi-deserts, dry to deciduous forests and woodlands, scrublands, to savannahs, grasslands, margins of swamplands and other wetlands, and even suburban areas where they use rocks, logs, tree trunks, downed or low vegetation and other debris on or near the ground to thermoregulate, forage, and seek refuge.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Legal and Regulatory Status(*Subject to Change)

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

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner.

Size

Eastern fence lizards are fairly small lizards that typically reach 4 to 7 ½ inches as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Provide a sturdy and secure enclosure that is escape proof. Fence lizards are active and arboreal lizards that can be maintained in at least a 20 to 30 gallon tall, well ventilated glass or screen terrarium or enclosure depending on one's ambient household temperatures and humidity. Slightly dampened peat moss, untreated potting soil, orchid bark substrates, or sphagnum moss can be utilized for a substrate. Additional furnishings for basking, climbing, hiding opportunities are also important components to a fence lizard setup, and should include natural or artificial foliage, rocks, logs, vines, or branches. These lizards can be misted periodically or can be provided a small, shallow water dish that should be cleaned and replaced regularly at least two to three times weekly.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Swifts will also bask, and thus a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter should be provided. Ideal temperatures for swifts range from 75 to 80 degrees F as an ambient temperature and around 90 to 95 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 fence 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; In the wild, fence lizards are primarily insectivorous, feeding on small insects and other invertebrates. In captivity, feed fence lizards a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. Feeder insects should be

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gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Fence 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

Fence swifts can be handled or restrained for short periods of time, but are typically not an overly suitable hands on species that tolerates frequent and/or prolonged handling. Too much handling will stress this species, and they are better maintained overall as a more hands off animal whenever possible.

****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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