



Emerald Swift (*Sceloporus malachiticus*)

Hardy Emerald Jewels

Emerald swifts, also known as the green spiny lizards, or emerald spiny lizards, are small, colorful members of the large, diverse “spiny lizard” family. Their scales are heavily keeled, giving them a spiny texture and appearance. Males are usually more vibrantly colored than females or juveniles, and are vibrant green with blue patches along their sides, belly, tails, and chins. Females and juveniles are gray to grayish brown with dark, irregular dorsal markings. Emerald swifts are primarily diurnal, arboreal lizards, and are also sexually dimorphic, with males being larger and more colorful and vibrantly colored than juveniles and females. Emerald swifts are popular and commonly kept pets that can make for great additions to the household, but must require the proper level of knowledge and foresight and should not be viewed as disposable animals.

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 malachiticus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision..*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, emerald swifts can attain longevity of 5 to 10 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

Emerald swifts are indigenous to the high altitude “cloud forests” of Mexico and much of Central America. Within this range, emerald swifts can be found in Mexico’s Yucatan region, to Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, to Panama.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

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Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner.

Size

Emerald swifts are fairly small lizards that average 6 to 9 inches as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Provide a sturdy and secure enclosure that is escape proof. Emerald swifts 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 an emerald swift 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. Being from relatively cooler cloud forests, 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 emerald swifts 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, emerald swifts are primarily insectivorous, feeding on small insects and other invertebrates. In captivity, feed emerald swifts 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. Emerald swifts 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

Emerald 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.

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****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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