



*Megan Villand

African Fire Skink (*Lepidothyris/Ripoa fernandi*)

Flames from Africa

Also known as the Togo fire skink, the African fire skink is a large species of insectivorous smooth scaled, terrestrial skink with a golden-bronze dorsal coloration and red, black, orange, and white lateral stripes, bars, and flecking. A primarily diurnal species of skink, Africa fire skinks also will burrow frequently in loose, moist to dry substrate, and may seek refuge under rocks logs, vegetation, and other debris. As with many other skink species, fire skinks are also oviparous, and will lay approximately 5 to 10 eggs in semi-moist, humid microhabitats and guard them from potential predators and other threats. African fire skinks are primarily a terrestrial species that has recently seen increased popularity in the pet trade. Although relatively little more is currently known about the fire skink's biology or reproductive habits in the wild currently.

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: Scincinae

Genus: *Lepidothyris*

Species: *Lepidothyris fernandi**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, fire skinks can potentially attain longevity of 15 to 20 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat

These large skinks are indigenous to the tropical rainforests, woodlands, and other vegetated areas of western Africa from Guinea in the west, to Angola and Kenya in the east and south.

Conservation Status

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

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Fire skinks are fairly small skinks that range from about 2 to 2 ½ inches as hatchlings, and 12 to 15 inches as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling fire skinks can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult fire skinks require a minimum of a 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure, or accordingly larger sized enclosures especially for a pair of skinks. Provide these skinks with substrates that enable burrowing such as fine aspen shavings, cypress mulch, or orchid bark. Also be sure to provide a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. Be sure to provide a small bowl or dish of fresh water that should be cleaned and replaced at least two to three times weekly or if dirtied. Misting once to twice weekly will also help maintain humidity at around 60 to 70% that fire skinks will enjoy.

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 these skinks range from 80 to 85 degrees F on the cool side and about 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 fire 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

Primarily Insectivorous; In the wild, fire skinks are primarily insectivorous, meaning they will eat insects, arachnids, worms, and other invertebrates, as well as occasionally other small vertebrates. In captivity, feed fire skinks a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, fruit fly cultures, or waxworms. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Fire 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. Other feeder items, such as small, pre-killed rodents can also be given on occasion, but sparingly. 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

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African fire skinks can become very accustomed to regular human interaction, and can often even be hand fed. Many can also be handled for short periods of time, but are often a faster moving and flightier species when in hand. Care should therefore be taken to not accidentally drop these animals when handling them.

****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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