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Pink Tongued Skink (*Hemisphaeriodon gerrardii*)

Miniature Skinks with Large Scale Appeal

Pink tongued skinks are a relatively medium sized skink species. This is a relatively slender bodied, smooth scaled skink with a long, semi-prehensile tail for climbing and gripping vegetation. Their slender bodies, limbs, and tails are a further adaptation enabling them to move through dense undergrowth. Their ground color ranges from a tan, silver-gray, to light brown with a series of darker brown or reddish brown bands encompassing the body and tail. A wide, darker black band is also present on the nape and forelimbs and a dark post-ocular stripe beneath each eye. As their common name describes, the tongue is pink in adults. Although primarily terrestrial, pink tongued skinks can also climb into short or low vegetation as well, and are crepuscular, or nocturnal. They are also fairly secretive and fossorial skink species, often being found within or under leaf litter, rocks, logs, and other vegetation and ground debris. These skinks also possess broad, flattened teeth and strong jaws enabling them to crush and consume hard shelled mollusks and other invertebrates such as snails. Pink tongued skinks are still relatively new to the pet industry, and can make for great captive breeding projects or even simply pets to keep for those seeking something still less commonly kept in the reptile industry and hobby.

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: Egerniinae

Genus: Hemisphaeriodon

Species: *Hemisphaeriodon gerrardii**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Captive longevity is still uncertain, but pink tongued skinks have the potential to reach 10 to 15 years or more in the wild or with correct care.

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Distribution and Habitat

The pink tongued skink is a relatively small to medium sized, arboreal to semi-arboreal species of skink indigenous to Australia. More specifically, this unique species ranges from New South Wales, along the eastern and eastern coastal regions of Australia, to Queensland. Within this range, pink tongued skinks occupy primarily terrestrial to arboreal or semi-arboreal environments, including wet sclerophyll forests and rainforests, as well as other moist areas within woodlands, where they utilize and seek shelter underneath the forest floor leaf litter, hollow logs, rock crevices, tree crevices and hollows, and other areas of vegetative growth. These unique skinks will also climb low trees and shrubs as well.

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

Pink tongued skins usually average from 6 to 9 inches as hatchlings, and about 18 to 24 inches, or roughly 1 ½ to 2 feet as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling pink tongue skinks can be housed in a 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adults require a minimum of a 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Provide pink tongued skinks with substrates that enable burrowing such as aspen chip shavings, cypress mulch, or orchid bark. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. Provide a bowl or dish of fresh water to help provide and maintain adequate hydration and humidity. Pink tongued skinks are primarily terrestrial, and do not require tall, or arboreal enclosures, although juveniles are more adept to climb than adults.

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 pink tongued skinks range from 75 to 85 degrees F on the cool side and ambient temperatures, and approximately 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 pink tongued 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

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Primarily Insectivorous to Omnivorous; In the wild, pink tongued skinks are subsist largely on slugs, snails, and other gastropods using their large, flattened teeth within their upper and lower jaws to crush the shells. They will also feed on a wide variety of other insects, worms, other invertebrates, and some fruit and vegetable matter. Pink tongued skinks are an omnivorous species. In captivity, pink tongued skinks can be offered, and will accept a wider variety of food than only gastropods, which can otherwise be difficult to select safely and acquire. Some of the food items these skinks will readily eat can include pesticide and chemical free earthworms, redworms, waxworms, mealworms, feeder crickets and roaches of appropriate size, and the occasionally frozen/thawed, or small, pre-killed rodent or small amounts of chicken or beef. Offer foods that are high in fat or protein sparingly, if at all. Several commercially available diets for omnivorous reptiles are also available, and can be used to supplement pink tongued skink diets. Most of these food items should also be supplemented with calcium and vitamin D3, and offered on a small plate or dish at least two to three times weekly, depending on the age, size, and overall health of the animal. 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

Unlike many other skink and lizard species, pink tongued skinks are a fairly slow moving and docile species that can be gently handled, although this species may gape and hiss, displaying their pink tongues if roughly handled or distressed. At least some level of care should of course be taken when handling these, or any animal to prevent dropping or otherwise injuring them in the process, as well as to avoid over-handling them (which can lead to unnecessary stress to the 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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