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Sandfish Skink (*Scincus scincus*)

Sand Swimmers

Sandfish are somewhat small to medium sized skink species with smooth scales on a long, tapered body characterized by a yellowish, tan, to orange-yellow ground color, and several darker bands or cross banding. The head and snout of this species are also very long and wedge shaped, and the lower jaw countersunk, both of which are indicative of being well adapted to burrowing and a subterranean lifestyle. This species' eyes and nostrils are also small to reduce sand clogging them. The sandfish skink is well adapted for a subterranean lifestyle and for literally "swimming" through sand or other loose substrates using undulation motions with its limbs tucked along its very smooth scaled, elongated body. They utilize this unique burrowing behavior to evade potential threats, as well as a means of thermoregulation in their hot, semi-arid environments. Also as with most other skink species, the sandfish skinks can also drop their tails through caudal autotomy, which momentarily startles and/or distracts the potential predator long enough for the skink to make an escape. A new tail regenerates after several weeks, although it is more vestigial than the original. Sandfish have made a strong debut into the herpetocultural hobby, and can make for very unique and low maintenance species of reptiles to maintain in captivity.

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

Genus: *Scincus*

Species: *Scincus scincus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

Although the sandfish skink is still fairly new to the pet industry, this species, if provided the proper care, can potentially attain longevity of 10 to 15 years or more.

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Distribution and Habitat

The sandfish skink is a relatively small species of burrowing, fossorial skink indigenous from northern, Saharan Africa to southwestern Asia. More specifically, this species can range from Morocco, Algeria, southeastern Libya, Egypt, and Sinai, to Israel, Jordan, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, and Iran. This species also occurs from the western Sahara, to Senegal, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and into southern Sudan. Within this range, sandfish skinks occupy primarily terrestrial environments, including sandy, arid to semi-arid deserts, dune areas, grasslands, and savannahs to open, dry forests and woodlands.

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

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Sandfish skinks are a fairly small skink species, ranging from 6 to 8 inches in length as adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. One to a pair of these skinks can be maintained in a 20 gallon long terrarium or similar sized enclosure, and they can be housed communally accordingly larger enclosures. As their natural habits and behavior indicate, sandfish will readily burrow into a loose substrate, of which at least 6 to 8 inches thereof should be provided. A loose, non-toxic substrate such as play sand, or ground walnut shells will be acceptable substrates to use. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and other hiding opportunities. Provide a shallow, sturdy bowl or dish of fresh water as well. Misting once to twice weekly will also help maintain humidity at around 60 to 70% that these subterranean skinks will enjoy.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Sandfish skinks are primarily diurnal and will require the appropriate overhead basking lights even though they are quite fossorial. 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 78 to 82 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 sandfish 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, sandfish skinks are primarily insectivorous, meaning they

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will eat insects, arachnids, worms, and other invertebrates, as well as occasionally other small vertebrates. In captivity, feed sandfish 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. Sandfish 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

As with many skinks, sandfish skinks can become quite 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

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