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## Shield Tailed Agama (*Xenagama taylori*)

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### **Miniature Knights in Shining, Built-in Armor!**

The shield tailed agama, also known as the turnip tailed agama, is a relatively small species of agamid lizard indigenous to the arid to semi-arid peninsular northeastern Africa region, or sometimes known as the Horn of Africa. An active, diurnal species that frequently basks and forages during the day, these small but personable lizards can vary in color from light brown, grayish-brown, yellowish brown, to brick reddish-orange, sometimes with darker cross-banding or markings dorsally. The most distinctive feature of this species are their very short, flattened, spiny tails often said to resemble shields, which are used to deter potential predators, and to cover their burrows with for additional protection. Shield tailed agamas are personable and hardy lizards that can be very enjoyable to maintain in captivity as a pet lizard species.

### **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:** Agamidae

**Genus:** Xenagama

**Species:** *Xenagama taylori*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, shield tailed agamas can attain longevity of at least 10 to 15 years or more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

Shield tailed agamas are indigenous to the arid to semi-arid deserts, grasslands, scrublands, and savannahs of the northeastern African peninsula, or the Horn of Africa, including Somalia, Ethiopia, Entrea, and Djibouti, to Saudi Arabia.

### **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**

Shield tailed agamas are very small as hatchlings, ranging from 5/8 to 1 inch in size. As adults, they are also fairly small agamids, usually reaching up to 3 ½ to 4 inches.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling shield tailed agamas can be housed in a 5 to 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult shield tailed agamas require a minimum of a 15 to 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Hatchling and adult shield tailed agamas can be maintained on a substrate of cage carpet or terrarium liner, chemical free potting soil, or ground walnut shell substrates. Provide a substrate that is at least 3 to 5 inches in depth for burrowing. Avoid using substrates made from reptile bark that result in environments that are too humid. Provide a small dish of clean water, and change and clean it every several days, or sooner if fouled. Soaking them at least once weekly in lukewarm water for 15 to 20 minutes can also help raise their hydration. Provide ample basking and hiding opportunities by providing artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs.

### **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 shield tailed agamas range from 70 to 80 degrees F on the cool side and around 90 to 110 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Nighttime temperatures can be allowed to drop from 65 to 75 degrees F. 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 shield tailed agamas 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 to Omnivorous*; As with most agamids, shield tailed agamas are insectivorous to omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. They will eat a variety of insects and other invertebrates, as well as fruit and vegetable matter. In captivity, feed shield tailed agamas mostly a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. They can also be given a mixed assortment of chopped up vegetables including carrots, peas, collard, mustard, and dandelion greens, and beans. Several commercially available omnivore mix diets are also available. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Shield tailed agamas 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

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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 reptiles, hatchling and juvenile shield tailed agamas typically tend to be initially more nervous and defensive than adults. Handle your shield tailed agama gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Although shield tailed agamas are generally not aggressive or defensive towards handling, they can be initially skittish. However, with regular handling and interaction, they can become quite tame and make for good and personable pets.

**\*\*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](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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