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Tanzanian Legless Lizard (*Acontias percivali*)

Legless and Worm-like Lizards

Also known as the Percival's legless lizard, the Tanzanian legless lizard is a relatively small, elongated, and limbless species of skink indigenous to southern to southwestern Africa. Relatively little is currently known about this species' natural history and reproductive habits in the wild. They are, however, known to be a burrowing, fossorial species, spending much of their lives within and underneath moist to semi-moist sandy or loamy soil where they swim through the sand or soil. There are also approximately 21 species of legless skinks from the genus *Acontia*, all of which are also live-bearing or ovoviviparous. As with many other lizards, Tanzanian legless lizards can also drop their tails when threatened. These skinks can be identified by their elongated, limbless snake or worm-like bodies with smooth scales, and fused eye lids. Their dorsal ground color ranges from bronze to copper to brownish-copper, and the lateral and ventral surfaces are a brighter golden to yellowish or yellow-orange in color.

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: *Acontias*

Species: *Acontias percivali**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

The Tanzanian legless lizard is relatively new to the pet trade, and most specimens are still wild caught. As such, captive and wild longevity for this species is currently unknown.

Distribution and Habitat

The Tanzanian legless lizard is a relatively small, burrowing to fossorial species of legless lizard indigenous to continental southern Africa. More specifically, this species ranges from southern

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Angola, northern Namibia, Botswana, Kenya, northeastern South Africa, disjunct areas of Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. Within this range, these highly unusual Tanzanian legless lizards occupy primarily terrestrial to fossorial environments, including the semi-dry savannahs, grasslands, and open forests, where they burrow into the loose soil and substrate, as well as other surface and ground debris in order to seek shelter and forage for food.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

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

The Tanzanian legless lizards belong to a genus of relatively small skinks, ranging from 8 to 16 inches snout to vent length, or SVL.

Housing and Enclosure

A small, burrowing and fossorial species, Tanzanian legless lizards can be housed in a 10 to 15 gallon or larger secure, escape proof terrarium or enclosure that is also adequately ventilated. Being a fossorial species, a particulate substrate that can retain moisture and humidity well, but not become overly wet or moist, or dry out too easily, should be provided. Suitable substrates for this species can include coconut bark or fibers, orchid bark, cypress mulch, or play sand mixtures. Provide at least 2 to 3 inches or more of substrate to enable burrowing. Additional furnishings that can be used for additional basking and hiding opportunities should include cork bark/flat hides, rocks, caves, log hides, or live or artificial plants, vines, and foliage. This species spends much of its time out of sight, but may come to the surface to bask under the correct conditions.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

For hydration and humidity, being a burrowing species, maintaining adequate moisture and humidity of the substrate is of more importance than ambient humidity, although this species in general requires higher humidity of 60 to 75%. When their substrate is kept adequately moistened, their need to drink is lessened, although a shallow water dish or bowl can also be provided at all times, and be changed regularly or whenever fouled. This species also tends to not be overly difficult to provide heating for as well. Provide a thermal gradient in the enclosure including adequate basking sites at a range from 70 to 75 degrees F for the ambient temperatures and cool side, and around 85 to 90 degrees F on the warm, basking end. Additional lighting can also be provided, and can probably benefit this species in providing additional UVA/UVB, calcium, and vitamin D3. Incandescent, or mercury vapor bulbs can also be used for overhead lighting and heating as well. 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

Probably Insectivorous to Carnivorous; Relatively little is known about this species' diet and

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feeding habits in the wild. However, they are likely to be insectivorous to carnivorous, probably feeding on a variety of small insects, arachnids, arthropods, and possibly occasionally small newborn rodents, eggs, or carrion.

In captivity, feed Tanzanian legless lizards 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. Tanzanian legless lizards 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

Tanzanian legless lizards, being a small burrowing species, tend to not be an overly handleable species. Although they are not aggressive, and seldom bite in self-defense, they may squirm and writhe vigorously, and may also drop their tails when handled. With most still being of wild caught origin, this is a species that should not be stressed from regular or over-handling, as stress can lead to compromised health and shortened longevity for this species in captivity.

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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