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Toad Headed Agamas (*Phrynocephalus sp.*)

These Lizards Are All Ears!

Toad headed agamas are relatively small to medium sized agamid lizards consisting of approximately 44 species in the genus. Indigenous to the arid to semi-arid, rocky or sandy environments, these unique lizards, depending on the exact species, are indigenous to southern Asia to eastern and southeastern Europe. As with most other agamid lizards, these lizards are active, diurnal species which defend their territories from perceived rivals, and have been found to also be excellent ambush, or sit and wait predators of insects and other smaller vertebrates and invertebrates. In some aspects, these lizards are even quite similar in their natural history to the horned lizards of North America! These lizards can also be quite variable in color, varying from whitish, to blackish, yellowish, reddish, tan, or light brown to grayish brown with variable darker dorsal markings and patterning. Their bodies and heads, which have rough, fringed skin and scales, are wide and flattened as well. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of toad headed agamas are their brightly colored tympanic membranes which are displayed when these lizards are threatened or territorial. Also when threatened are these lizard's peculiar habit of curling their tails upward to display bright or much more boldly darkened coloration beneath. Overall, toad headed agamas are personable and hardy lizards that can be very enjoyable to maintain in captivity as a unique and uncommonly kept 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: *Phrynocephalus*

Species: *Phrynocephalus sp.**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, toad headed agamas can attain potential captive longevity of at least 10 to 15 years or more.

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Distribution and Habitat

Depending upon the species, toad headed agamas are indigenous to the sandy to rocky, arid to semi-arid deserts, scrublands, steppes, grasslands, and other open environments from southern and southeastern Europe, through much of southern Asia. More specifically, species from this genus may be found from the Middle East, east across to Manchuria.

Conservation Status

Conservation status is dependent upon the species. Some are IUCN Least Concern (LC), while others are IUCN Critically Endangered (CE), Vulnerable (VU), Endangered (EN), or Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Toad headed agamas are relatively 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 toad headed agamas can be housed in a 5 to 10 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult toad headed agamas require a minimum of a 15 to 20 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Hatchling and adult toad headed 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 toad headed 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 toad headed 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, toad headed 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 these agamas mostly a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches,

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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. Toad headed 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 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 toad headed agamas typically tend to be initially more nervous and defensive than adults. Handle your toad headed agama gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Although these agamas are generally not aggressive or defensive towards handling, they can be initially skittish and may display their tympanic membranes when threatened. 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

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