



*Lesley Marshall

Uromastyx or Spiny Tailed Lizards (*Uromastyx spp.*)

Heat Loving Spiny Tails

Uromastyx are medium sized to large agamid lizards are also known as the “dabb” or “spiny tailed” lizards, as well as occasionally mastigures. They are medium sized to large agamid lizards that can be highly variable in color depending on sex and species, ranging from blackish, tan, yellowish, reddish, olive, to brown usually with lighter spots or ocelli on the back. All uromastyx can be identified by their short broad heads and short, thick, spiny tails. When these lizards are threatened or sense danger, they will seek retreat into rock crevices or burrows and inflate their bodies to make themselves very difficult to remove, and they will also use their spiny, club-like tails for defense or as a shield. Uromastyx will also frequently bask, thermoregulate, and forage during the peak of the warmest portions of the day. Uromastyx have, and still are rapidly becoming very popular, docile, and personable mid-sized lizard pets as more species, subspecies, localities, and even color morphs are becoming available in the herpetocultural hobby and industry.

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

Subfamily: Uromasticinae

Genus: Uromastyx

Species: *Uromastyx spp.**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, most uromastyx species can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more in captivity.

Species

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Several species of uromastyx are commonly kept, including the **Mali Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx maliensis*), **Egyptian Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx aegyptica*), **Nigerian Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx niger*), **Saharan Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx geryi*), **Moroccan Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx acanthinurus-nigriventris*), and **Ornate Uromastyx** (*Uromastyx ornata*).

Distribution and Habitat

Uromastyx, or spiny tailed dab lizards are a very widely distributed genus of primarily terrestrial, arid to semi-arid region dwelling agamid lizards which, depending upon the species and subspecies, can range across much of the Saharan northern to northeastern Africa, through the Middle East, and into southwestern and south-central Asia. Within this broad range, species of uromastyx can occur in Egypt, Libya, Palestine, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, as well as Algeria, Niger, Mali, Chad, Sudan, and Yemen. Within these ranges, most species of uromastyx occupy arid to semi-arid, rocky deserts to semi-deserts, scrublands, open savannahs and grasslands, to open, dry forests and woodlands, where they will seek shelter in deep burrows and/or rocky crevices in order to thermoregulate, forage for food, and avoid predation.

Conservation Status

Conservation status is dependent upon the species. Some are IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC). Others are IUCN Near Threatened (NT), or Vulnerable (VU).

Legal and Regulatory Status(*Subject to Change)

Uromastyx spp. are CITES Appendix II as of October 2017. Also consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Uromastyx range from 10 to 30 inches depending on species. The Mali Uromastyx averages about 14 to 20" as adults. The Egyptian Uromastyx tends to be the largest species, reaching up to 36 inches or roughly 3 to 3 ½ feet.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling uromastyx can be housed in a 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult uromastyx require a minimum of a 40 gallon long terrarium or enclosure. Some of the larger species may require larger housing. Hatchling and adult uromastyx can be maintained on a substrate of cage carpet or terrarium liner, play sand mixtures, or ground walnut shell substrates. 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

Uromastyx are well suited for living in hot, arid conditions. 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 most uromastyx range in the low to mid 90's degrees F on the cool side and around 120 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 uromastyx in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the

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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 Herbivorous; Uromastyx are primarily herbivorous, eating fruit, vegetable, flower, and other plant matter with insects and other invertebrates occasionally eaten as well. Diet composition can also vary somewhat depending on the species. In captivity, feed uromastyx mostly a mixed variety of vegetables and greens including carrots, peas, kale, corn, collard and dandelion greens, mustard greens, and beans. Feed green leaf lettuce sparingly if at all. Some appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms can also be given. Several commercially available omnivore mix diets are also available. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Uromastyx 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 uromastyx typically tend to be initially more nervous and defensive. Handle your uromastyx gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Some species of uromastyx, such as the Nigerian uromastyx, can be slightly more skittish than others, but most adults will settle down considerably and become quite docile, personable, and interactive pets to keep with the correct care and handling.

****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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