

KEEPING THE EASTERN & BLOTCHED BLUE TONGUE SKINKS GENUS *TILIQUA* IN CAPTIVITY.

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INTRODUCTION:

Keeping the Eastern Blue Tongue Skink *Tiliqua scincoides* and the Blotched Blue Tongue Skink *Tiliqua nigrolutea*, is easy for most "seasoned" herpetologists as we already know the rules...this paper is however not intended for them rather the new people just starting to keep Reptiles. From now on I will be referring to the Eastern Blue Tongue as *T. scincoides* and the Blotched Blue Tongue as *T. nigrolutea*. Having said this both *T. scincoides* and *T. nigrolutea* are easy to keep as adults, juveniles can be somewhat more difficult. This due to mainly to stress.

HOUSING:

Adult pairs of both species need a cage about 400mm wide X 1200mm Long X 400mm High. Juveniles can be kept in smaller conditions but should be kept by themselves. The cage can have a variety of substrates ranging from gravel or tanbark to newspaper. SAND should not be used as it can get in the eyes of specimens causing infection and blockages of the tear ducts. I personally use absorbent paper towel or kitty litter such as breeders choice, as its easily cleaned. Other effective substrates include astroturf and plastic. If using astroturf you should have 2 pieces cut to size. So when one gets soiled the other can be put in while other gets washed. If using gravel, paper or plastic the toenails may need to be clipped...this should only be done by experienced people, as the vein within the nail can also be knicked possibly leading to bleeding. All need cover, in which they can hide...this can be provided by a hollow log or a rock near the back wall, leaf litter and other things like a flower pot cut in half etc. At least one hide should be in the warm end and one in the cool end of the cage. The cage also needs to be well ventilated; this can be done by a Fly wire or pegboard lid, a series of cupboard vents or small drilled holes. The water bowl should large enough for the lizard to swim while being shallow enough for him to be able to reach the bottom. This should be situated in the cool end of the cage. The entire cage should be cleaned out at least once a week to prevent the build-up of germs and any faeces taken out as soon as noticed.

HEATING:

ALL HEATING should be placed at one end of the cage.... This creates a thermal gradient. This is vital for the survival of the occupants as if the cage is either too hot or too cool the lizard has a place to retreat to. Ways of heating include a 40-watt coloured light bulb(s) placed at one end of the cage connected to a thermostat. A heat mat at one end or both the light bulb and the heat mat. Excessive heat will kill your lizards very quickly. The cold can also be detrimental but this is no where near as bad both surviving temperatures of 0 degrees C for very brief periods. Ideal temperatures for *T. scincoides* are about 28 to 31degrees C at the warm end of the cage, while *T. nigrolutea* is cooler at 26 to 28 degrees C at the warm end of the cage.

LIGHTING:

While it's a bit controversial I believe that it's essential for juvenile blue tongues to have access to "Natural" Light. "Natural" light can be provided in several ways, such as limited exposure to natural sunlight (I believe that this is the best way), the use of a Florescent tube such as "REPTI-GLOW 5.0" or "REPTI-SUN 5.0" both of these commercially available tubes mimic natural sunlight's spectrum including UVA and UVB. Which are both vital for healthy bone growth as it aids in the proper digestion of Calcium in reptiles and some amphibians. Regardless of what it says on the package these lights really only work properly if the light is WITHIN 300 mm of the lizard, so it's possible that the light may need to be suspended within the cage. Both "REPTI-GLOW" 5.0 and REPTI SUN are available in 2 ft and 4 ft models. If heating the cage with a globe set up, the cage must have dark coloured globes such as green or blue. This will then not interrupt its photoperiod. The whole genus *Tiliqua* with the possible exception of *T. adelaidensis*, are Diurnal, with being active also at dusk on warm evenings. Thus the photoperiod of 14 hours light to 8 dark in summer and 12 hours light and 12 dark in winter is acceptable.

FEEDING:

The genus *Tiliqua* are omnivores both accepting live and dead prey. Examples of what can be fed to Blue tongues are: Various Fruits and vegetables such as apples, bananas, lettuce, endive, watermelon (not the seeds), tomatoes, carrot, mangoes, cucumber, zucchini and many more...I however do not recommend citrus. Other plants: some plants such as clover, and the flowers of roses, hibiscus and dandelions are relished. However remember some are poisonous so should not be fed. Snails and Slugs: other than that they need to be of an appropriate size I have NEVER seen these be refused. DO NOT collect the snails/slugs from an area that has been baited. Other invertebrates such as worms, spiders, slaters, and some beetles have also been eaten. Raw meat such as beef and chicken also are taken as well as raw and boiled chicken eggs. 1 in 3 meals should be dusted with a reptile calcium/vitamin supplement such as REPCAL and HERPITVITE this will ensure that the lizard is getting the right amount of balanced foods essential for survival. Also vary the diet it's more enjoyable for the lizard to be offered a variety. Now remember most lizards won't feed if they are too cold.

COOLING:

Cooling allows for the males sperm to be produced and the in the females ova to be made. The temperature of cooling should drop to about room temperature. However this drop should not be sudden, by turning on the heat for 4 hours in the morning for 4 weeks either side of the cooling period (1-month) this will allow the lizard to gently go into torpor. (In Australia most reptiles don't truly go into hibernation.). While being cooled the animal should not be handled or fed. If fed the food may kill the lizard as it will rot within its stomach as heat also plays a role in digestion.

YOU SHOULD NOT cool juveniles, gravid (pregnant), sick or under weight individuals as this can lead to the death of the lizard. When your *Tiliqua scincoides* or *T. nigrolutea* is an adult (over 200mm Snout to Vent (S.V.L.)) it should be cooled in the winter months.

REPRODUCTION:

All *Tiliqua* are viviparous (live bearing), however litter size varies.

Tiliqua nigrolutea averages a litter size of 7 but can be anywhere between 2 and 12, the neonates are however a lot larger than those of *T. scincoides*. At birth 85mm S. V. L. average for *T. nigrolutea*. The gestation period varies but is around 120 days at 23 degrees Celsius. *Tiliqua scincoides* averages a litter of 9 but ranging from 3 to 25, the neonates are about 65mm S. V. L. Gestation period is about 110 days at 25 degrees Celsius. The mating period is from late August to early March. The actual act of mating usually lasts about an hour while up to 11 hours is recorded.

REFERENCES:

Weigel, J.R. (1988) *Care of Australian Reptiles in Captivity*, R.K.A., 144 pp.



