



Basilisks

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The basilisks (*Basiliscus spp*) originate from Central and Southern America, where they are often found near water. In fact, due to specialised scales on the bottoms of their rear feet, they are able to run across the surface of water for some distance before the surface tension is broken, leading to their nickname of the "Jesus lizard". They can be medium-large and somewhat skittish lizards, so are not ideal for amateur reptile keepers.

Scientific Classification

Basilisks belong to the Order Squamata, Suborder Sauria/Lacertilia, Family Iguanidae, Genus Basiliscus.

There are 4 known species of basilisk, but the most commonly seen are the Green or Plumed (*Basiliscus plumifrons*), the Common (*B.basiliscus*), and the Brown or striped (*B.vittatus*).

General care

A wooden/chipboard vivarium with sliding glass doors makes the most appropriate setup for basilisks, being easy to clean, insulate and keep secure. The minimum recommended size for a group of 3-4 basilisks would be 250 litres, but obviously these lizards will enjoy as large an enclosure as it is practical to keep. These lizards can be kept alone or preferably in groups of one male and several females, but owners should be aware that two males will often fight so should not be kept together.

Inside the vivarium, a hiding place should be provided which may be half a log, a purpose built cave or even just an empty box with a hole cut in the side. Branches of different lengths and diameters should also be placed around the vivarium at varied locations, to allow these lizards to climb and bask as they would in the wild. Lastly, a pool or large water bowl is necessary to allow natural bathing behaviour.

Hygiene

A vivarium should be "spot-cleaned" daily to remove any droppings, dead insects or uneaten greens. Once a week, the whole vivarium can be cleaned with a disinfectant suitable for reptiles (further details of suitable disinfectants can be obtained from your vet). It is important to always wash your hands thoroughly after handling reptiles as they can carry Salmonella.

Substrate

It is important to use a substrate that is easy to keep clean and replace, and is not going to cause a problem if accidentally eaten. Newspaper therefore makes the ideal substrate, but another alternative would be a substrate which retains humidity well such as cocoa fibre. Wood chips or shavings should never be used as they commonly cause intestinal blockage in lizards.

Temperature

Reptiles are not capable of regulating their own temperature so it is very important to keep their environment at an appropriate temperature at all times. A temperature gradient should therefore be provided, giving your reptile a hot end where they can bask and a cooler end to which they can retreat.

There are several types of heat sources available for vivariums including ceramic heaters (infra red light bulbs), tube heaters, reflector bulbs (incandescent spot lights) and heat mats. Incandescent spot lights will



Barrier Animal Care Clinic LLP

Registered in England Partnership No. OC303416

Members: B Spolander BVSc MRCVS & S Rennie BA VetMB MRCVS

Tel: 020 8293 6580 Fax: 020 8858 5609 Email: wellpetclinic@btconnect.com

www.wellpetclinic.co.uk

VAT Reg: 691 3368 16





provide the ideal basking spot for your basilisk, but should not be used as the sole heating source whereas heat mats are more useful in providing a background heat for the whole vivarium.

It is important whichever form of heating is chosen, to always use some form of thermostat so that temperature can be accurately controlled. Heat sources should also be protected with a wire mesh guard or similar safety device if they are within a basilisk's reach.

The ideal temperature range at which to keep a basilisk would be **28-31°C (82-87°F)** in the daytime, with a basking spot of **35°C (95°F)**, and temperatures falling no lower than **23°C (73°F)** at night.

Humidity

This should ideally be measured with a hygrometer and kept moderate-high (60-70%) for basilisks that are used to a tropical environment. This humidity can be achieved by frequent misting of the vivarium with water.

Lighting

Basilisks need to have access to both UVA and UVB rays, which many supposedly "full spectrum" reptile bulbs do not supply, so it is important to check this before purchasing a bulb. UVB rays are very important to allow a reptile to produce Vitamin D, which is essential for the absorption and use of calcium. Without this lizards are at risk of developing Metabolic Bone Disease, which can often be fatal.

Various different types of UVB lights are available. It is important to check the percentage of UV supplied by the bulb. Lizards such as anoles require at least 5% UV output. UV lights should be left on for 10-14 hours daily and replaced every 6 months.

Diet

Basilisks are insectivores and in captivity should be offered a variety of insects, such as crickets, mealworms, and the occasional waxworm (although these should only be treats). Crickets and mealworms are readily available at most pet shops. These crickets and mealworms are however, generally not high in nutrients directly from the pet shop and will need to be fed well (GrubGrub, baby cereal, fresh fruit & veggies) before being offered to your basilisk. This is called 'gutloading'. Live food should be 'gutloaded' for 24 hours before feeding. It is also important that the appropriate sized insects are fed to avoid problems with impaction. A general guideline is that the insect should never be bigger than the distance between your reptile's eyes. Juveniles need feeding every day, with adults only requiring feeding every other day. In addition, feeds should be sprinkled 2-3 times / week with a powdered multivitamin/mineral supplement (further details can be obtained from your vet).

Lifespan

Basilisks generally live about 6 years

Signs of Health

A healthy basilisk will be bright and alert with clear open eyes and nostrils and a clean vent. Skin should be undamaged with no sign of parasites, and shedding should occur regularly. Your basilisk should also be keen to eat, and pass faeces at least every 2-3 days. It is important to become familiar with your basilisk's normal appearance, movement and behaviour, in order that signs of illness can be noticed at an early stage.

It is advisable to take your basilisk to a vet who routinely deals with reptiles for a general health check and faecal sample at least once a year.



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Signs of Illness

Reptiles will often not show obvious signs of illness until they are very sick, but you should look out for any changes in appetite or faeces passed, as well as changes in weight, behaviour, skin colouration or breathing. Other signs of illness include discharges from the eyes, nose or mouth or problems with shedding.

If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to contact a reptile vet as soon as possible.

This caresheet is only intended as a general guideline, so please ask for further information.

Written and researched by Joanna Hedley BVM&S MRCVS



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