



Prehensile-Tailed Skinks

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The Prehensile-Tailed or Monkey-Tail skink (*Corucia zebrata*) originates from the Solomon Islands. Here it can be found in the rainforests, where it spends the majority of its time amongst the tree branches or resting in hollows during the day, only becoming active at night. Unlike many reptiles, it appears comfortable living in small family groups in the wild, but is usually very aggressive to other new skinks. In captivity, introducing new skinks can be challenging as severe aggression is very common. The dangers of their teeth and claws both to other skinks and human owners should not be underestimated.

Scientific Classification

Prehensile-tailed skinks belong to the Order Squamata, Suborder Sauria/Lacertilia, Family Scincidae, Genus Corucia.

General care

A wooden/chipboard vivarium with sliding glass doors makes the most appropriate setup for skinks, being easy to clean, insulate and keep secure. Being an arboreal species, the enclosure should be tall with the minimum recommended size being 4ft (1.2m) long x 2ft (60cm) wide x 4ft (1.2m) high, but obviously these lizards will enjoy as large an enclosure as it is practical to keep. Skinks can be kept alone or in mixed sex groups, but owners should be aware that two males will often fight and should be housed separately.

Inside the vivarium, several hiding places should be provided (at least one hide for each skink) 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 diameter should also be placed around the vivarium to allow skinks to climb up and rest as they would in the wild.

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 or kitchen towelling 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, tube heaters, reflector bulbs (incandescent spot lights) and heat mats. Heat mats can be particularly useful in providing a background heat for the whole vivarium, whereas lightbulbs can be used to create a basking spot in the daytime, but should not be relied on as the only heat source.

It is important whichever form of heating is chosen, to always monitor it carefully with a thermometer and 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 gecko's reach.

The ideal temperature range at which to keep a skink would be **25-29°C (77-84°F)** in the daytime, with a basking spot of **32-35°C (89-95°F)**, and temperatures falling no lower than **21°C (69°F)** at night.



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Humidity

This should ideally be measured with a hygrometer and kept moderate (~60%) for skinks that are used to a tropical rainforest environment.

Lighting

Skinks 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 skinks require at least 5% UV output. UV lights should be left on for 10-14 hours daily and replaced every 6 months.

Diet

Prehensile tailed skinks are herbivores, eating a wide variety of vegetation in the wild.

In captivity therefore, although it can be difficult to replicate their natural diet, a wide variety of foods should still be offered. Ideally, fresh leafy greens should make up 75-80% of their diet. These can include collard, kale, carrot tops, turnip and dandelions. The remainder of their diet can be other fruit and vegetables.

Fresh food and water should be supplied once daily and dusted with a multivitamin/multimineral supplement powder two or three times a week.

Lifespan

Prehensile tailed skinks generally live between 15-20 years.

Signs of Health

A healthy skink 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 skink should also be keen to eat, and pass faeces at least every 2-3 days. It is important to become familiar with your skink'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 skink to a vet who routinely deals with reptiles for a general health check and faecal sample at least once a year.

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.
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