

## Eastern Blue-Tongue Lizard

*Tiliqua scincoides*

The Blue-Tongue Lizard is found from South Australia through Victoria, eastern NSW, most of QLD and north western WA.

They are a slow moving diurnal (daytime) lizard found in a wide range of habitats from coastal heaths, dry sclerophyll forest, woodlands, and grasslands.

They feed on insects, Arthropods, snails, carrion, wildflowers, fruits and berries. They shelter at night in hollow logs and ground debris. They are live bearing and can have up to 25 young in a litter. They make excellent pets and are great for children and beginners.



**CAUTION:** These lizards can deliver a painful and bloody bite.

**OUTDOOR HOUSING:** Bluetongues are relatively simple to keep and make great pets. They are best kept outside in areas where they occur naturally. The enclosure could consist of a fenced off garden area, with the fence extending 50 cm below ground and 80 cm above it.

Other alternatives are modified aviaries or small empty swimming pools. The enclosure should receive at least 8 hours of sun each day but always have a shaded area as well. A permanently dry area is very important during periods of wet weather. It is recommended that a shade cloth or bird netting cover be used to exclude predators.

**CAPTIVE ENVIRONMENT:** Cage furnishings should be kept simple, although during winter provide a layer of leaf litter or dry grass below a rain-proof shelter at one end of the cage so that your lizards can hibernate. Enclosures must be secure and escape proof.

**INDOOR HOUSING:** They can also be kept indoors in a smaller enclosure for one or two adults. This would need to be top-ventilated, a minimum of 100 x 50 cm long and provide a basking area heated to about 35°C by a spotlight for several hours each day. It would also require lighting with a full spectrum UV fluorescent tube for 8-10 hours each day. This needs to be replaced every six months or so to maintain its effectiveness. Include a low, flat hide box and leaf litter or dead grass for shelter.

**WATER:** Water can be provided every now and then in a very shallow, non-spillable container.



**FOOD:** Feed on a variety of foods including soft and hard fruits and vegetables, daisies and hibiscus flowers large insects, small mice, raw meat and canned pet food (no fish). Periodical dusting of their food with calcium/vitamin supplement is recommended. Vary diet as much as possible to provide a healthy balance. These lizards will eat snails, but be aware of collecting these in areas where poison baits are laid. Feed adults once a week and young individuals every 3 or 4 days.

**CAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR/BREEDING:** Can be timid at first but will settle and become tolerant of gentle handling. Never hold your lizard upside down and try to always provide something for its feet to contact. After a few days without exposure to humans, they will revert to their natural defensive behaviour of opening mouth and hissing when approached. This quickly subsides again. They have small peg-like teeth, but strong jaws. Sexing is difficult in these lizards, although males tend to have larger heads and longer tails. All have live young in late summer or early autumn, with bluetongues producing more than four in a litter.

**DISEASES:** A clean artificial reptile environment with the appropriate husbandry mentioned above will usually result in your pets remaining healthy. Quarantine newly acquired animals for at least a month before introducing them to those already being kept.

**REPTILE MITES:** Reptile mites are the scourge of many keepers. They can rapidly multiply and quickly kill a reptile. If an infestation is found, it is imperative that you take immediate action to eradicate it. Although small (a large female may be one-third the size of a pin head) they will be obvious on white paper as miniature black tick-like animals. If you find you have an infestation, it is important to kill it in situ. Please ring Dr Mike (07) 4151 3550 for help.

**TICKS:** When first purchasing your reptile, check it for ticks. These are often seen in the ears or tucked under the scales. They can be removed using tweezers and the bite site dabbed with antiseptic.

**FURTHER READING:**

Care of Australian Reptiles in Captivity – John Weigel. Reptile Keepers Association, Gosford, NSW.

Keeping Bluetongue Lizards – Grant Turner. Australian Reptile Keeper Publications, Melbourne, Victoria.