



## Husbandry Handbook

# BLUE TONGUE SKINK *Tiliqua sp.*

### Why the Blue Tongue?

One of the most unique characteristics of this amazing reptile is its large fleshy blue tongue. In an animal whose color is made up of tans, browns, oranges, silvers, and blacks, it definitely stands out. So what is it for? The bright fleshy blue tongue is used for defense and to scare off predators. When a skink is approached by something looking to make it into a meal, it puffs up and makes its body as large as it can, hisses loudly, opens its mouth wide, and flattens out that bright blue tongue. The combination of bright pink flesh in the mouth and the dark blue tongue is an unexpected sight and will confuse the predator long enough for them to run away. If absolutely necessary, they can also drop off their tail to get away when attacked.

### Habitat

Blue tongue skinks are native to Australia, New Guinea and islands of Indonesia. The majority of species found in the pet hobby are New Guinea/Indonesian species *Tiliqua gigas* and the Australian species *Tiliqua scincoides*. Their habitat includes open woodlands, the margins of forest and fields, and semi-desert habitats. These lizards spend most of their day either foraging for food and basking under the sun light or burrowed under leaf litter and debris.

### Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling blue tongue skinks can be housed in a 20L Zilla® Critter Cage® product, but adults require a minimum of a 40BR Zilla® Critter Cage® product. While blue tongue skinks can get up to 24", they are terrestrial and don't need a tall tank. Provide blue tongue skinks with substrates that enable burrowing such as Zilla® Lizard Litter or Zilla® Bark Blend. Decorate the tank with a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. Don't forget a bowl or dish for fresh water. These lizards shouldn't be kept together, as they are territorial and will fight.

### Temperature and Lighting

It is important to create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure. This can be done with an appropriate sized Zilla® Heat Mat adhered to the bottom of the tank on one side. Ideal temperatures for blue tongue skinks range from a low of 75-80°F and to a high of 80-85°F. Provide a basking area of 90-95°F. Blue tongue skinks also require UVB lighting to be healthy. Using a Zilla® Heat & UVB Fixture with a Zilla® 50W Mini Halogen bulb and a Zilla® Desert Series 50 UVB Bulb will provide the correct heat and UVB needed for your blue tongue skink to thrive. Make sure to place the light over the side with the heat mat to help maintain the thermal gradient. Spot clean the enclosure to remove urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Every 3 months, remove all substrate and clean and disinfect the tank and décor.

### Feeding/Diet

In the wild blue tongue skinks are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. Blue tongue skinks in captivity should eat a mixed assortment of chopped up vegetables, including carrots, peas, collard, mustard, and dandelion greens, and beans. They will also accept crickets, mealworms, superworms, roaches, and waxworms. Another option is Zilla® Reptile Munchies Omnivore Mix. Don't forget to feed Zilla® Gut Load Cricket Drink and Zilla® Gut Load Cricket and Insect Food to your feeder insects for added nutritional value. Make sure to spray their foods with Zilla® Vitamin Supplement Spray and Calcium Supplement Spray.

### Handling

As with many reptiles, hatchling and juvenile blue tongue skinks typically tend to be initially more nervous. Handle your skink gently and deliberately, taking care not to drop or injure the animal. Allow them to walk on and through your hands but don't squeeze them. Most adult blue tongue skinks will settle down considerably and become quite docile and personable pets to keep.

*Be sure to wash your hands after handling any animals.*

