

Care Cards

Spiny-Tailed Lizards



Spiny-tailed lizards are commonly known as *Uromastix*, however in certain parts of the world they may also be called dabb lizards or mastigures. Spiny-tailed lizards are members of the genus *Uromastix*, and the family *Agamidae*. They are found in the arid zones of Africa and Asia. Spiny-tailed lizards are flattened dorsoventrally with short strong legs and a characteristic tail with large spine-like scales. There are approximately 16 species in the world, although certain individuals may consider some subspecies. The most commonly available varieties are the Egyptian spiny-tail (*Uromastix aegyptius*), the ornate spiny-tail (*U. ocellatus ornatus*), and the ocellate spiny-tail (*U. ocellatus*). The Egyptian spiny-tail is the largest species, growing over two feet in length and weighing several pounds. The majority of spiny-tailed lizards grow to about one foot in length and weigh between 100 and 400 grams.

Spiny-tailed lizards are listed in Appendix II of the Convention for the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES). Only a few countries allow the exportation of the reptiles; and unfortunately many specimens die from the stress of importation. I suggest purchasing captive-born animals whenever possible to prevent this problem. Always demand documentation from the seller that the animal was either legally imported or captive-born within the United States.

Spiny-tailed lizards are heliothermic (heat loving), and therefore requiring a cage environment with

a high temperature and low humidity. They prefer arid or desert type vivaria where they can either burrow or hide in rock crevices. The lizards use their large, well-protected tail to block the entrance from predators. Spiny-tailed lizards are hardy and can usually live for several years. They can be housed either individually or in small groups provided there is only one male per enclosure.

Spiny-tailed lizards are easily housed in an enclosure with a minimum length of three feet. The substrate should be either washed play sand or crushed walnut with a rocky area for hiding. The cage temperature should be between 90 and 94 degrees Fahrenheit during the daytime and between 70 and 74 degrees Fahrenheit at night. A basking site with an incandescent spotlight allowing the temperature to exceed 110 degrees Fahrenheit should be provided on one side of the enclosure. Full-spectrum, ultraviolet lighting should be used to insure proper calcium metabolism. My personal favorite is ZOOMED's Reptisun 5.0. Whenever possible, your lizard should be provided direct, unfiltered sunlight to further enhance its calcium absorption. The lighting cycle should be 14 hours during the summer and 10 hours during the winter.

Spiny-tailed lizards are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. The young are more insectivorous while adults prefer plant material. They should be offered a daily salad consisting of: mustard greens, collard greens, turnip greens, dandelion greens, peas, green beans, corn, alfalfa, carrots, sweet potato, lentil, bird seed, and various berries. Insects like superworms, waxworms, crickets, beetles, and ants should be offered once or twice a week. A high quality vitamin and mineral supplement should be mixed with the salad every 7 to 10 days. Spiny-tailed lizards have a special gland located in their nares for salt excretion. This enables them to excrete large amounts of minerals without effecting their overall hydration status.



As stated earlier, spiny-tailed lizards may be housed in small groups provided there is only one male per enclosure. Females may show aggressive behavior toward other females during breeding season and while gravid. If weight loss or bite marks are noted on a lizard, it should be separated from the group. Newly acquired lizards should be either examined for intestinal parasites or prophylactically treated for them. This is important prior to any cooling down period. Unhealthy animals should not be hibernated or cooled down to stimulate reproductive behavior.

Most varieties of spiny-tailed lizards are sexually dimorphic. The males usually are more brightly colored and possess large femoral pores. Some of these changes may be noted as early as six months, however, sexual maturity is usually reached between 18 to 24 months of age.

A cooling down period of two to three months starting in December is required to initiate breeding activity. A temperature drop to 55 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit is sufficient for this process. Some spiny-tailed lizards will remain

active even at this low temperature. Once the cage temperature returns to normal levels, the males will start courting the females. Males will head-bob and nudge their snouts into the female's side. The males will then chase the females around the enclosure nipping at their necks. During copulation, the males will hold on to the female by their neck and position their tails and hemipenes for insertion into the female.

When the females become gravid you can either move them into their own enclosure, or a section of the enclosure can be divided off to allow for an egg laying area to be established. Several inches of damp sand should be provided for burrowing and egg deposit. The egg laying will usually take place between April and May. The eggs should be incubated in a mixture of one part water to four parts vermiculite by weight. Incubation temperature should be between 88 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit and hatching should occur between 70 to 90 days after laying. The hatchlings should double their weight within the first week and at one month be separated to prevent fighting.

Spiny-tailed lizards are easy to maintain in captivity. They are not aggressive lizards and are easy to handle. They rarely bite and can even be hand fed. When frightened they puff up their body and wave their spiny tail around. Because of their protected status, experienced herpetoculturists should be encouraged to breed their reptiles in captivity.

References:

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- 5) Gray, Randall: The Natural History, Husbandry and Captive Propagation of the Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizard, *Uromastyx acanthinurus*: The Vivarium, Volume 10 Number 1.
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