

# SKINKS

(Bobtails, Bluetongues & Skinks)



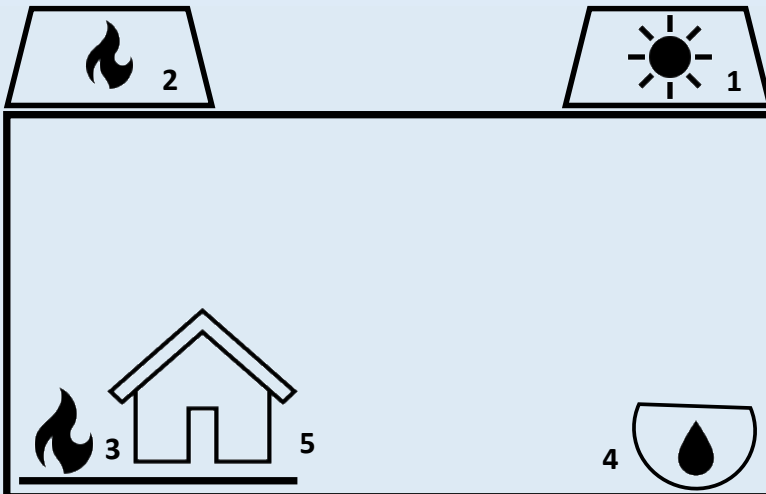
Skinks make a wonderful household pet that is outside the conventional realm of dogs and cats. These lovely lizards are a minimalist keepers dream with bellies that are easy to please and lots of personality. They are a great family companion for adults and kids alike – they have even been known to enjoy a nice head rub and a cuddle from their keepers.

## Housing

**Enclosure Size:** Enclosure size will depend on the number of skinks you intend to house together; however, our advice is to house them separately. A single skink should have enough room to walk, turn around & maintain a solid thermal gradient (cool end, warm end). Skinks are mainly terrestrial, although some will climb with a suitable space, so an enclosure size such as 60cmLx45cmDx45cmH, is recommended for a juvenile. Enclosure size should be grown with your skink as to not overwhelm them with an oversized environment.

Enclosure materials should also be considered as they offer different traits.

- Glass: waterproof but offers no insulation against heat loss.
- MDF: keeps heat well but is not watertight.
- Custom Enclosures: can be tailored to your needs but can be expensive.



### Example Enclosure Setup

1. UVB Light
2. Heat lamp
3. Heat cord or mat
4. Water bowl
5. Hide

**Temperature:** Many skinks are native to cooler areas (i.e., Bobtails & King's Skinks in the Southwest region), therefore their needs are not as extreme as other lizard species. Enclosures should have both a "cool end" and a "warm end" that allows your skink to choose the temperature it would like to be. Skinks enjoy a warm spot of 33-35°C and a "cool end" between 22-25°C.

**Lighting/Heating:** Skinks will mostly stay at the bottom of their enclosures but can climb and bask if needed. We have found the most successful way to heat skinks is:

- Top heat via a reflector globe that is set on a timer (10-12 hours)

- Bottom heat using either a heat mat or heat cords (24 hours)
- A separate UV light (we recommend Arcadia Pro T5 UVB 14%) set on a timer.

The wattage of your lights/heating will depend on the size of your enclosure and should be controlled with a thermometer/thermostat to ensure the correct temperatures are being maintained.

**Substrate:** There are several great substrates that can be used for skinks!

- Paper towel: easy to clean & replace.
- Fake grass: easy to clean but can smell.
- Kitty litter paper pellets: traps moisture/odour but may be ingested.
- Reptile safe sands: easy to clean but may be ingested.

**Accessories:** Keeping your skinks enclosure simple to begin with is recommended while you get used to each other. A simple beginner enclosure will include:

- Water bowl
- Hide/s
- Rock/s to bask on
- Fake plant/s to hide in

## Handling

Each skink will have a varying personality, so it's important to work with their specific needs. Skinks need to be held in both hands with all their limbs supported to avoid flailing, struggling & injury. Handling can be slowly introduced daily to avoid overwhelming them, with sessions kept gentle and calm, allowing your skink to move somewhat freely in your hands. Pets such as dogs and cats should be kept out of the room while you are handling your reptile, and supervision is recommended for children.

*\*See troubleshooting below for common handling problems\**

## Feeding

Skinks are omnivores and will eat a variety of bugs, plants, fruits, meats & commercial pet foods. It is important to feed your skink different foods to ensure they're receiving the correct levels of calcium, phosphorus, vitamins, and protein.

As a juvenile, we recommend feeding smaller quantities of food more often, which can then be modified as your skink grows. An example would be:

- 1-3 months: Feeding small amounts twice a day.
- 3-6 months: Feeding once a day.
- 6-12 months: Feeding every 2<sup>nd</sup> day.
- 12+ months: Feeding 2 times a week.

**Water:** Skinks will actively be seen drinking from their water bowls, so it is important to keep it topped up with fresh water. Water bowls placed in the "cool end" of the enclosure can be cleaned weekly and monitored for water loss.

**Supplements:** Calcium powder helps with the development of your skink's bones and can be given with every few feeds (dusted on food). Monitor your skink's droppings for substrate ingestion, this can be a sign of calcium deficiency. Appropriate levels of nutrients can help reduce risk of MDB later in the life of your skink.

*\*See Discover Deadly's "Lizard Feeding Guide" for information on lizard safe foods\**

## Troubleshooting

### **My skink isn't eating!**

If your skink is new, they may need a few days to settle into their environment – this can be quite a stressful time for them (and you). A few contributing factors to new or adult skink not eating include:

- Temperature – is your enclosure at the correct heat for the species?
- Excess and/or stressful handling sessions
- Food – your skink may want a change of diet.
- Torpor – Skinks may go into a state of inactivity for a few hours up to a few weeks at a time.

### **My skink didn't slough (shed) properly!**

A juvenile skink should be shedding regularly as they grow and gain weight fast, and a healthy adult may only shed a few times a year. Skinks do not tend to shed in one solid piece; rather lots of smaller pieces that fall off while your pet runs around in its enclosure. Ensure that your husbandry is correct (heating, humidity, access to water etc.) as this can all affect your pet's ability to shed correctly. Check areas such as the toes and tail tip as shed often gets stuck here and may need to be assisted.

If all other attempts have not worked, seek professional advice. Do not attempt to remove large pieces of skin yourself as this can cause damage to scales and lead to further issues.

*\*See below references for vet recommendations\**

### **It's winter and my skink is acting different!**

Your new skink may go into a state of torpor during the cooler months. This is an involuntary behaviour that some reptiles have adapted to survive when temperatures are too low for metabolic activity (usually a body temperature below 32°C). As a juvenile, we recommend using heat 24 hours a day for the first few years of its life as this can help reduce the likelihood of your skink entering torpor. Keep an eye on your thermometer temperatures during the cooler months, especially at night. Food can still be offered to your pet as this is not a prolonged state and will last a few hours up to a few weeks depending on conditions.

### **Bites!**

Your new skink may try to bite you during handling sessions; know that this is not

likely to hurt or cause any injury and is expected to happen at least once during the life of your pet. There are a few possible reasons why a skink may bite:

- Feeding– this is usually the result of the handler placing their fingers near their pet while eating or using their fingers to feed instead of tongs.
- Accidental – some animals will instinctively open their mouths when there is something pressing on their jaw.
- Defence – dragons don't like to be approached from above as it can startle them or make them think an overhead predator is nearby.
- Incorrect handling – Support your skink from underneath using a flat, open palm to create a solid platform.

### **I lost my skink!**

Always check your enclosure is closed correctly, and never leave your skink outside of its enclosure unsupervised. Some skinks can move quite fast, and you are likely to find them hiding somewhere dark and warm. If you do lose your new pet, there are steps you can take:

- If possible, restrict lizard to the room it was lost in (i.e., if lost in the lounge room, close all windows, seal doors by wedging a towel underneath, close vents etc.)
- Most cannot climb well, so look under tight places like couches, behind bookcases etc. however, some species (King's Skinks) can climb.
- Look in places that emit heat like fridges, dishwashers, behind TVs, windowsills.
- If the animal cannot be located, contact the DBCA (Department of Biodiversity & Attractions) as soon as possible and follow their instructions.

## **Book a One-on-One Session**

With over 40 years combined experience in the herpetology industry, the Discover Deadly team share a range on expertise. Consultant sessions are available for general advice or more specific issues. Bookings can be made online for \$30 up to 15 minutes.

## **Resources**

Your first point of contact for advice/enquiries should always be your original breeder, however, there are several professional businesses that can be reached out to.

- Unusual Pet Vets (Murdoch) 08 6117 7440
- Unusual Pet Vets (Osbourne Park) 08 6117 7450
- Busselton Vet Hospital 08 9752 1433
- Discover Deadly 08 9755 1771
- Southwest Pets (Bunbury) 08 9721 6217
- DBCA 08 9442 0300

### **Further Reading:**

- "Keeping Blue Tongue Lizards" by Grant Turner

- "Keeping & Breeding Australian Lizards" by Mike Swan
- "Australian Lizards: A Natural History" by Steve K Wilson
- "Lizards of Western Australia: Skinks" by G.M Storr, L.A Smith & R.E Johnstone

This care sheet© has been produced as a general guide for Western Australian reptile keepers. It should not replace the advice of a veterinarian. Discover Deadly takes no responsibility in the misuse of the information provided.

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