

KEEPING ADVICE SHEET

Bluetongues & Bobtails

Western Bluetongue

Tiliqua occipitalis



Bobtail

Tiliqua rugosa rugosa



Centralian Bluetongue (*Tiliqua multifasciata*) – Maximum length 35 cm. Category 2.

Western Bluetongue (*Tiliqua occipitalis*) – Maximum length 40 cm. Category 2.

Bobtail (*Tiliqua rugosa rugosa*) – Maximum length 40 cm. Category 2.

NATURAL HABITS: Centralian Bluetongue occurs in most habitats in the arid northwest and interior. Western Bluetongue occurs in a variety of habitats from coastal dunes, woodlands and sandplains throughout the southwest, except the cool forests. Bobtail occurs in a variety of dry habitats including in association with humans in gardens and paddocks throughout the southwest, south of about Kalbarri.

The Bobtail is primarily diurnal, although the bluetongues are active at night during hot weather.

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

OUTDOOR HOUSING: Bluetongues and bobtails are relatively simple to keep and make great pets. They are best kept outside in areas where they occur naturally. For example, a bluetongue from the Kimberley

would not be maintained outdoors in Perth during winter. 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 male bobtails 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 and bobtails less than this.

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*. This can be achieved by placing a Sureguard Ministrip™ within the respective cage for at least 8 hours before cleaning. Then follow-up with two 8-hour cycles two days apart. DO NOT expose your pet to the pest strip for any longer or you may kill it.

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.

Keeping Shingleback Lizards – Darren Green. Australian Reptile Keeper Publications, Melbourne, Victoria.