



Red-Eyed Crocodile Skinks

Tribolonotus gracilis

INTERMEDIATE • 7–10 IN ADULT • 8–12 YR LIFESPAN • CREPUSCULAR • NEW GUINEA

They look like miniature crocodiles and act like nothing of the kind. Red-eyed crocodile skinks are small lizards from the rainforest floor of New Guinea, armored in rows of keeled scales, and they spend most of their lives out of sight under leaf litter. The honest version: this is an animal you watch, not one you handle. Get the humidity and the hiding right, and a shy lizard will show itself on its own terms.

AT A GLANCE

Difficulty	Intermediate
Adult size	7–10 in
Ambient temp	72–78 °F (68–72 °F night)
Basking spot	82–86 °F
Humidity	70–90%
UVB	Low output, beneficial
Diet	Crickets, earthworms, roaches
Feeding	Every 2–3 days
Lifespan	8–12 years



Captive-bred red-eyed crocodile skinks turn up on breeder tables at NARBC shows, named for the ring of orange scales around each eye.
Photo: Philipp Hoenle / iNaturalist · CC0

01

A Lizard That Screams, Then Plays Dead

Crocodile skinks are built like armored tanks and behave like prey, because they are. Corner one and it may shriek, a genuine distress call, or go limp and play dead with its legs stiff. Both are signs you've pushed too far. Handle only for health checks and moves, keep it brief, and support the whole body. It's rated intermediate for a reason: the husbandry is exacting, and the animal will never meet you halfway.

02

Housing: Floor Space First

Read this as floor plan first, height second. An adult needs 24×18×18 at minimum, and a 36×18×18 front-opening enclosure is where these skinks actually settle in, with room for litter, caves and a water dish. Racks don't work at any stage, because they can't hold humidity or cover. Cohabbing is the classic mistake. Two males will fight, and in a closed box the loser has nowhere to go. Even a mixed pair pushes the shyer animal off food and out of the best hide. House one skink per enclosure.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	12×12×12	18×12×12	Secretive. Bury them in cover and hold humidity at 80% or above.
Juvenile	18×12×12	24×18×12	Slow growers. Handle rarely, and only when there's a real reason.
Subadult	24×18×12	24×18×18	Plays dead when frightened. Work around them slowly; don't trigger it.
Adult	24×18×18	36×18×18	Bioactive is near-required: leaf litter, caves, standing water. Not handled.

Enclosure sizes in inches, from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Floor space matters more than height, and racks aren't suitable at any stage.

03

Heat and Light, Kept Gentle

Keep the room-temperature end at 72–78 °F with one warm surface at 82–86 °F, and let the night drop to 68–72 °F. That range is modest, so a low-wattage overhead bulb or deep heat projector on a thermostat is usually plenty. Never a heat rock. They scorch the skin pressed against them. A low-output UVB tube is beneficial and worth fitting. These skinks are crepuscular, so keep the lighting soft and the cover thick.

04

Humidity and Standing Water

Hold humidity at 70–90%. Deep, damp substrate and a heavy layer of leaf litter do most of that work; misting tops it up rather than replacing it. Wild crocodile skinks live on wet forest floor near streams, and **a shallow water dish large enough to sit in, changed daily, is not optional**. Keep some airflow so the enclosure stays humid rather than stale, and buy a real hygrometer. Dry air is the slow killer here, not the dramatic one.

05

Build It Bioactive

Bioactive isn't a fashion choice for this species. It's close to a requirement. Start with several inches of moisture-holding soil mix, then bury it under leaf litter deep enough for the skink to disappear into. Add cork bark, a few caves, and live plants for cover at ground level. Springtails and isopods keep the damp substrate clean and double as snacks. Skip loose sand entirely; it's wrong for the biome and wrong for a young animal's gut.

06

Small Prey, Fed Often

Straight insectivore, and a hungry one for its size: small crickets, earthworms, small roaches and isopods every 2–3 days. Gut-load the feeders. With a UVB tube fitted, dust D3-free, phosphorus-free calcium at most feedings, plus a D3 multivitamin weekly while growing and twice monthly for adults. With no UVB, calcium with D3 twice a week replaces the plain powder those days; drop the multivitamin. Feed at dusk, and pull uneaten crickets out the same night. They chew on a resting skink.

07

Health Red Flags

A crocodile skink that sits out in the open day after day is telling you something is wrong. Sunken eyes and skin that stays tented when pinched mean dehydration. Add stuck shed on toes and tail, and food refused for more than a week. Gaping or clicking breaths mean a cold, wet setup and a respiratory infection. A soft or swollen jaw points to calcium failure. Any of these is a reptile vet visit, not a parameter tweak.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual - when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.