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Uromastyx

Natural Habitat

A total of 16 species of the *Uromastyx* genus are together commonly referred to as spiny-tailed lizards. *Uromastyx* are native to Northern Africa, the Middle East, and all the way across southwestern Asia to northwestern India. Because their range is broad, their natural habitat varies, and although some prefer rocky crevices, others live in burrows and sandy deserts. *Uromastyx* come in a variety of different colors with small scales over the head and body and large, spiky scales going down their tails. Most measure less than 14 inches in length, but *Uromastyx aegypticus* can grow to be 30 inches in length and can weigh several pounds.

Housing

Generally, *Uromastyx* are desert species; therefore, they are best kept in desert setups (temperature and humidity).

Cages can consist of glass aquariums, metal stock tanks, or wooden boxes.

Newspaper or paper towel should be used for substrate. Other substrates such as sand or dirt could present risks for the health of the lizard (intestinal impaction, respiratory problems). Rocks or other objects should be placed in the cage to provide climbing and basking sites. Heavy objects, such as rocks, must be securely anchored, or the lizard will burrow underneath, causing the rock to fall and crush it.

Hide boxes provide the animal with a sense of security and are especially important for gravid (pregnant) females.

Temperature

Uromastyx are adapted to hot desert conditions (ideal humidity around 10% to 25%). The cage should have a daytime hot basking spot where the temperature exceeds 120°F; however, the lizard must be able to retreat to areas in the low 90s or 80s Fahrenheit. Incandescent spotlights can provide hot basking sites.

Under-tank heaters can be used to supplement heat; however, these are diurnal species, and they regulate their body temperature by basking in the sun. Spotlights more accurately approximate the way diurnal lizards obtain their heat naturally.

Your *Uromastyx* must have direct sun or a suitable ultraviolet (UV)B-producing fluorescent light. Plant grow lights do not produce UVB, and most so-called full-spectrum lights do not produce UVB

Information cited from:

Mayer, J and Donnelly, T., eds. Clinical Veterinary Advisor: Birds and Exotic
Pets. Elsevier, Philadelphia, PA. 2013. ISBN: 9781-4160-3969-3

either. Several UVB lamps are available on the market, including the following: ZooMed Reptisun 5.0 UVB fluorescent reptile Bulb and ZooMed Reptisun 5.0 UVB compact fluorescent Bulb (these 2 UVB lights need to be changed every year and should be placed at a maximum distance of 12 inches from the animal, with no plastic or glass screen between the lamp and the animal); and T-Rex Active UV Heat and ZooMed Powersun UV (these two lamps provide UVB and heat to your reptile, which is ideal, and need to be changed every 3 years. The maximum distance between the animal and the lamp should be 6 feet, and no plastic or glass screen should be placed between the animal and the lamp). Our light of choice is produced by the company named Reptile UV; more information about these products can be found on the Internet at <http://www.reptileuv.com>.

Diet

Uromastyx are omnivorous, which means that they consume both animal and plant materials. Because no data about the specific nutritional requirements of this genus are available, a large variety of food items should be offered.

Young animals more readily accept insects such as waxworms, crickets, and super mealworms, which should be offered 3 or 4 times per week. The following vegetables should be offered: kale, collard greens, mustard greens, sweet potatoes, carrots, peas, corn, and green peas. Dandelion greens, alfalfa, grass, and flowers can be added to the diet. Beans such as split peas, lentils, navy beans, and others should also be provided. Some of these beans can be sprouted before feeding. Bird seed should be mixed in with the salad. A reptile vitamin containing calcium should be sprinkled on the salad (ZooMed Reptivite). Some commercial iguana chows can also be mixed in with the salad to ensure better nutrition.

Most species of Uromastyx are adapted to live without access to free water. Rather than drinking, many species obtain moisture from the food they consume. Evidence suggests that some species, such as the Australian Moloch and the North American horned lizard, collect morning dew on their scales; this is then channeled toward the mouth. Water can be provided infrequently in a bowl; however, the bowl should not be left in the cage for long periods, or it can raise the humidity to possibly unacceptable levels.

Handling

Uromastyx can be handled by supporting their pelvis and hind limbs with one hand, and holding them around the neck and shoulders with the other. Their spiny tail is used for defense, so care must be taken to avoid being struck with the tail. This can lead to minor injury and abrasions to the handler.

Behavior

Most lizards are territorial, which means that the male and sometimes the female will defend an area from members of the same species or even from other species. Often in captivity, two male lizards will fight openly, so Uromastyx males should be housed separately. Some reports have described females fighting other females, so they too should be housed separately if aggression is noted. The temperament of individual Uromastyx varies between species; although some are social and amenable to handling, others tend to hide whenever humans approach their enclosure. Captive-bred lizards tend to be better socialized and easier to tame than wild-caught Uromastyx.

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Lifespan

Uromastyx have a lifespan of approximately 10 to 20 years.

Common Medical Conditions

- *Parasites.* Many Uromastyx species are wild caught and will have parasites when they are purchased. These wild-caught animals may have more trouble adjusting to captive life, so it is generally preferred that captive-bred animals be purchased. Captive-bred lizards tend to be better socialized and make better pets.
- *Intestinal impaction.* This can occur when the Uromastyx is housed on inappropriate substrates such as walnut shells, cedar and other wood chips, silica sand, cat litter, or colored pebbles. If the Uromastyx accidentally ingests substrate (usually accidentally attached to food), this can lead to intestinal impaction.
- *Wounds.* As already mentioned, Uromastyx tend to be territorially aggressive, and fighting can cause significant injury. Care must be taken to avoid thermal burns if heating lamps can be accessed by the lizard. Hot rocks are to be avoided because they can cause significant burns to basking lizards.
- *Metabolic bone disease.* Diets that are deficient in calcium or vitamin D3 may lead to a specific type of metabolic bone disease called nutritional secondary hyperparathyroidism. This can be caused by feeding diets low in calcium or high in phosphorus and by lack of exposure to UVB lights. Symptoms reflect demineralization of bone and include fractures, skeletal deformities, weak eggshells, and possibly muscle tremors and seizures. A well-balanced diet can go a long way toward preventing this disease. It is recommended that salads be sprinkled with calcium supplements (ZooMed Reptivite). Some commercial iguana chows can also be mixed in with the salad to ensure better nutrition.

Sources of additional information include the following: <http://www.anapsid.org/uromastyx.html>; and Johnson JD: Exotic animal care: spiny tailed lizards, Exotic DVM 8.4:36-40, 2006.

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Information cited from:

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