



Portsmouth Reptile & Amphibian Society
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P.R.A.S Care sheet No 13



Species Common Name: Dab lizards

Scientific Name: *Uromastyx spp*

Care Difficulty: Intermediate. This is suitable for a keeper with experience with keeping lizards in hot and dry conditions.

Distribution:

The species is distributed from Senegal to Egypt.

Description:

The Dab lizard is a burrowing lizard that needs a very high temperature and low humidity to survive. They live on dry desolate, often rocky plains with sparse vegetation. The most frequently seen for sale is *Uromastyx acanthinurus* from Morocco.

Size:

The larger Dab Lizards subspecies grows up to 45cm (18"). They have a heavy spiny tail that is about half the total length of the animal. Colour varies from beige to black depending on species. When the adults are at their optimum temperature their colours are bright and vivid. Females are smaller than the males and have a narrower head. The base of the tail is also narrower in the female as they do not have to accommodate hemipenes.

Housing:

For a pair or trio of Dab lizards a wooden vivarium with sliding glass door measuring 120x60x60cm (47x24x24") would be ideal. Because these animals like to burrow they need a substrate layer as deep as possible, however this may not be possible so you may need to make an artificial burrow for them using a plastic box with some slightly damp soil/sand mix., then use a plastic tube to make a tunnel from the box to the top of the substrate. Each lizard in the enclosure should have its own burrow.

For a substrate use either fine sand or pea gravel. Because these animals are ground dwellers it is not necessary to have branches for them to climb on, but they should have some rocks to wander over, plus a few bits of cork bark to dart under.

There is one basic rule for keeping Dab lizards and that is to keep them very warm. They need a background temperature of around 32°C (90°F) with a basking site of 49°C (120°F). At night the temperature can drop to 21-24°C (70-75°F). They also need a full spectrum light of preferably high intensity. An overhead ceramic heater on a thermostat is the best for the main heating source. For the basking sight use a 100-watt reflector spotlight over a rock at the same end as the heater. The light should be on ten to twelve hours a day e.g. 7am to 6pm. The heating sources should be put onto suitable thermostats to prevent overheating or accidents. Care should be take with these heat sources that they cannot come into contact with the lizards and burn them, or prevent a fire hazard.

Diet and Feeding:

Dab lizards are primarily vegetarian, but can be fed a few crickets every 10-14 days. Younger animals can be fed insects about once a week.

They will eat most chopped leafy greens including endive, kale, mustard greens and small amounts of spinach and lettuce but not iceberg. When available they will also eat dandelion leaves and flowers. The diet should also include 25-40% thawed frozen mixed vegetables such as peas, green beans and mixed vegetables. Other items include grated carrot and chopped peppers. As a treat once a week feed them some soft fruit like grapes and chopped banana. This foodstuff should be sprinkled once a week with calcium and Vitamin supplements such as Nutrobal. They will also nibble at a cuttlefish bone left in the vivarium. To avoid the build up of moisture as well as fruit flies and off odours in the tank remove the fresh fruit and vegetable after each feed session. Dab lizards are greedy seedeaters with and will eat a large variety of seeds, especially sunflower seeds and lentils. To provide them with nibbles through the day place a bowl of seeds in the vivarium including that above and mixed bird seed too.

In the wild in is unlikely that these lizards drink water. They can get all the water they need from metabolising their food plus they can get water from the fat reserve stored in their tail. The best way to make sure they have some water is to lightly spray and fresh food but not seeds (they will go mouldy). The animal can also be sprayed on the back with warm water; this will immediately be absorbed through the skin. Do not leave a water bowl in the tank; it will raise the humidity too much.

Breeding:

The lizard needs to have a brumation period of two to three months starting around December. During this time the temperature should be lowered to 18°C (65°F) and the photoperiod should also be reduced. The lizard may still be active during this time and should be provided with a less powerful basking light. Smaller meals should be provided at this time when they decide to leave their burrows.

When the animal comes out of brumation in February or March they should be ready to breed. The male will mark his territory. The male will curl his tail into a tight circle, he tip of which is close to his snout. He then spins in place and deposits a white substance from his cloacal glands on the ground. It is also common for the females to do this. If the female is ready to breed she will allow the male to bite her neck and sides without

running away, eventually allowing the male to copulate.

Egg laying occurs four to six weeks after mating, A clutch may consist of 12-20 eggs over 2.5cm long, white and oval in shape. They should be incubated in moist vermiculite in a relatively moist incubator at about 30°C (86°F). Incubation time is about 100 days. Once the young emerge they may take up to a week before they will take food. Mortality for these young lizards in captivity is quite high. Studies are continuing to determine better husbandry of these young lizards.

References: *Basic care of Uromastyx* by Phillippe de Vosjoli
Uromastyx and butterfly agamids by Jerry G. Walls