



Portsmouth Reptile & Amphibian Society
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P.R.A.S Care sheet No 11



Species Common Name: Basilisks

Scientific Name: *Basiliscus spp.*

Care Difficulty:

Moderate. These lizards make a good alternative to the large green iguana. Avoid purchasing large wild caught specimens as they will be prone to rubbing their noses and may have high parasite burdens. They may live in excess of ten years.

Distribution:

They are found in through out Central America. *B. basiliscus* (the common or brown) from Southern Central America to Columbia, *B. plumifrons* (Green or plumed), Panama, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. *B. vittatus* (banded). Mexico to Columbia. *B.galleritus* (red headed), the Pacific slopes of Columbia, Ecuador to Panama and Costa Rica.

Description:

Bright green colouring, large dorsal fin and caudal fin (found in the male). These lizards are arboreal and prefer locations near water. Being easily frightened, the lizard will drop from a branch overhanging a pool of water and scurry off to seek protection. Having specialized scales on the bottoms of the rear feet, basilisks are able to run across the surface of water for some distance before breaking the surface tension and swimming away hurriedly. They have been thus dubbed the "Jesus lizard" in parts of their native countries. In captivity, these lizards tend to maintain their somewhat skittish nature and do not make the best pets for those who wish to handle their pets frequently.

Size:

Males grow to around 0.8-0.9m (2.5-3'). Females a little smaller.

Housing:

Basilisks are active lizards and therefore require quite a large space when adult. A vivarium 1.5x1.5x0.6m (5x5x2') is adequate for a trio of adults. Males will not tolerate

other males. Hatchlings must be kept in much smaller enclosures such as the larger size pet boxes, and then moved into larger enclosures as they grow. Basilisks are tropical, arboreal lizards that live around water. It is important right from hatchling size that plenty of branches are provided to climb on. The substrate should be such that it retains moisture, a peat moss mix is ideal. A larger water feature should also be included. The minimum size should be at least the length of the animal and at least half its body deep. Basilisks may defecate in the water so it is essential that the water container is easy to clean and disinfect, which may be on a daily basis. Spraying with water regularly is necessary, as 80% humidity is required for breeding. It would be recommended to include a hydrometer for your vivarium to make sure that correct humidity levels are achieved.

Basilisks should be maintained at temperatures of 29-31°C (84-88°F) during the day with a 4°C (10°F) drop at night. Methods for achieving the correct temperatures can include heat tape, heat cable or spot or ceramic heaters or a combination of these.

They must be thermostatically controlled to ensure that the vivarium does not over heat. Spotlights and Ceramics must be inaccessible to the animals to avoid burns.

Recent years have seen a change in attitude by some experts who now favour vitamin and mineral supplements as opposed to UV lighting (see under diet). However, a full spectrum bulb is still recommended to provide lighting. This should be controlled on a timer to regulate the changing photoperiods throughout the year and may be used to induce breeding.

Diet and Feeding:

Hatchlings and juveniles are mainly carnivorous though their diet will become more omnivorous as they grow. They will eat 2 -3 week old crickets dusted with a vitamin and mineral supplement such as Nutrobal™ every other feed. The size of its food should be increased as the lizards grow, as should the variety. Their diet can consist of mealworms, wax worms and new-born mice. Most animals will prefer to take several small food items rather than large ones, and care should be taken not to feed too large an item. Large crickets can give a nasty bite to any lizard. Young animals should be fed every couple of days, adults two or three times a week. Basilisks may become addicted to wax worms, numbers of these should therefore be limited as they are fatty and may form deposits that can affect the liver. Vegetable matter that can be fed should include: a salad vegetable, dark green leaves of cabbages and lettuces, and also grapes and melon. Food that is high in yellow colour, added to the diet, will tend to bring out the green colour in the plumed basilisks.

Breeding:

Breeding of the animals in captivity is becoming more common. They may reach sexual maturity in 18-24 months. It is recommended that any animals to be bred are at least 46cm (18") in length, have good body weight and are in good health. From late autumn through the winter the photoperiod and temperatures should be gradually reduced, ultimately giving 10 hours daylight. The day temperatures should be reduced to around 24-26°C (75-78°F), and a little less at night. This should be maintained for a few weeks and then reversed to achieve optimum conditions by early spring. Feeding over this period should also be reduced. Following the rest period the animals should breed. Females will

lay 4-18 eggs, depending on species, about 6-8 weeks after copulation. This can occur up to 4 times a year, though numbers tend to decrease with each clutch. A lay box should be provided, this should consist of sandy peat moss to a depth of 10 inches. Once laid the eggs should be removed and placed in damp vermiculite (1:1 by weight) with 1/3 of the egg showing. They should be incubated at 29-30°C (84-86°F) and will hatch after 45-60 days. It can take up to 2 days for all the young to emerge. Once sex can be determined any males should be removed to avoid fighting. Males will show signs of femoral pores on the inside of their thigh.