

# Solomon Island Prehensile-Tailed Skink

**Aka: Monkey-tailed skink**

*Corucia zebrata*



**NOTE:** In recent years, prehensile-tailed skinks have been listed under CITES appendix II, indicating that the species may become threatened - due to extensive logging in their native habitat.

Because of this, it is important to be sure that your lizard was captive bred in the United States and NOT taken from the wild.

**LIFE SPAN:** 15 + years

**AVERAGE SIZE:** 24-36 inches  
14-28 ounces

**CAGE TEMPS:** Warm side – 78-85 °F  
Basking – 95-100 °F

**CAGE HUMIDITY:** 70-90 %

\* If temp falls below 68° at night, may need supplemental infrared or ceramic heat for night-time

**WILD HISTORY:** Prehensile-tailed skinks are from the tropical forest regions of the Solomon Islands, which are northeast of Australia. These skinks are arboreal and live in trees.

**PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:** The prehensile-tailed is the largest of all the known skinks. They range in color from a spring green to a deep olive green, with blotches or bands of black on the back and tail; all of which helps it camouflage well. The bellies range from a deep cream to a yellow color. The eye irises can be brown, green or gold.

The head is flat, substantial and rectangular.

This skink is notorious for the frequency and distinctive smell of its defecation.

Like many skinks, the skin is smooth and shiny with scales that lie flat. Their special tails will not regenerate if broken off.

These skinks have long toes with sharp claws and jaws lined with small but sharp teeth.

**NORMAL BEHAVIOR & INTERACTION:** The Solomon Island Prehensile-Tailed Skink is also called the monkey-tailed skink, because it uses its tail much in the way a monkey does – to grasp and hold on to branches and other objects. The tail acts as a fifth limb when they are climbing in trees, as a safety net to catch them if they slip, and as a repelling rope to hang from. Prehensile-tailed skinks can deliver a good bite, and will hiss when aggravated.

These lizards are crepuscular – which means they are most active in the early morning and early evening.

Like all skinks, this animal is a livebearer (viviparous) and it does provide some parental care to its offspring. Females generally give birth to only one baby (after a gestation period of 6-8 months), which rides around on the mother's back until it is ready to go out on its own, which is often up to one year.

Unlike other reptiles, prehensile-tail skinks live in social groups called *circulus*. They are very territorial and will go to great lengths to protect their family.

Housing **male skinks** together will create a dominant/submissive hierarchy and will result in one skink becoming stressed to the point of illness, anorexia, and possibly death. Male skinks also tend to be extremely aggressive toward one another and will fight, sometimes to the death.

**Female skinks** may be housed together IF there is ample space and food for each skink. Two to three skinks can live happily together, provided there is enough space for all.

**Males and females** should NOT be housed together, as the male skinks will continually try to mate with the females; leaving the females exhausted, aggravated, and stressed. The female may stop eating and become extremely ill.

**NOTE:** DO NOT house prehensile tailed skinks with other species due to the differences in environment, temperatures, and the fact that some species can be highly stressed in the presence of other species. Each species may also harbor different parasites/protozoans/bacteria (even a healthy reptile harbors a small amount at all times), which may make each other ill.

**FEEDING:** Prehensile-tailed skinks are strictly herbivorous, eating only plant matter. They are the ONLY completely herbivorous skink!

**VEGETABLES:** Dark leafy vegetables such as collard and mustard greens, kale and red tip leaf lettuce are good for a dragon, as are alfalfa pellets, clover, parsley, and broccoli, green beans, peas, squash, grated carrots and sweet potatoes.

(Prehensile-tails LOVE sweet potatoes!)

Spinach and iceberg lettuce should never be fed.

Remember to wash vegetables thoroughly, then cut or shred to make it easier to ingest.

Remove any uneaten vegetables before turning the lights off at night.

**FRUIT:** Prehensile-tailed skinks seem to love berries and fruit. Be sure to offer a good amount as often as possible.

Fruits such as figs, kiwi, apples, raspberries, strawberries and melons can be fed.

**SHEDDING:** Unlike snakes, lizards shed their skin in patches, not all in one piece. Your pet may become an overall dull color, and the skin over the eyelids may 'pop' at a certain point and make your lizard look like a bug-eyed bullfrog. Do not peel off the skin if it is not ready to come off. This can be dangerous and painful.

Most lizard species will shed every 4-6 weeks. If the enclosure environment is ideal, the keeper often has no idea that their pet has shed, as it will happen more quickly and the lizard will often eat its own shed skin.

In the wild, reptiles have a much easier time with their sheds, as they are generally in a more naturally humid environment and have access to pools or bodies of water in which they can soak at will. Even reptiles from arid areas find humid places to go during the shedding process, such as cold, moist burrows under the sand or caves.

The shedding process happens when the lizard's body begins to grow a new layer of skin; that new layer begins to separate from the old and a very thin layer of fluid forms between the two layers. If your pet's enclosure is too dry, this fluid layer will not form properly, making it difficult for your reptile to shed properly.

To create more humidity, the entire tank can be lightly spray misted twice a day during shedding time. Spray once in the morning and once later in the day. Make sure the later spray dries completely before lights go off for the night.

Some lizards may also benefit from a 'moist box' during shedding time. This can be a Tupperware-like container (with the cover on) containing a bed of moist reptile terrarium moss. The container should be big enough for the entire lizard to be inside with an entry door cut in the side just large enough for the lizard to come and go at will. Keep the moss moist but not watery, and place the box on the heating pad in the tank.

If your lizard still has a hard time getting the shed completely off its toes, tail or head; help him by spraying the area with water and gently massaging the skin until it peels off. If the retained shed is severe and cannot be removed easily, see your exotic veterinarian.

**SUPPLEMENTS:** Dust food with calcium supplement and vitamin supplements. As a rule, a growing juvenile's food (and a pregnant/gravid female's) should be dusted more often than an adult's. Follow your veterinarian's instructions for applying supplements to avoid over-supplementing food.

Our veterinarian recommends dusting food with a good quality calcium supplement fortified with vitamin D3, 2-3 times a week. (Avoid using a calcium supplement with added phosphorous, unless specifically directed by your veterinarian, since this can promote kidney disease.)

Always consult your veterinarian for specific directions on supplementing your pet's food, since there are many variables that go into determining the best supplementation regimen for each animal.

**WATER:** Prehensile-tails obtain most of their needed water from the food that they eat. They seldom come down to the ground to drink; however, clean water must be available at all times. Place the water crock on the cool side of your reptile's enclosure. Change it daily, or as needed, as your pet will most likely bathe in it as well. Lizards will often defecate in their water bowl, as the warm water seems to have a laxative effect on reptiles! All water given to reptiles for drinking, as well as water used for misting, soaking or bathing must be 100% free of chlorine and heavy metals. (Not all home water filtration systems remove 100% of the chlorine and heavy metals from tap water). We recommend that you use unflavored bottled drinking water or bottled natural spring water; never untreated tap water. If tap water is used, you should treat it with a de-chlorinating treatment. Do not use distilled water, which can cause severe medical problems, since it lacks minerals that are essential to important body functions. If only tap water can be used, at least de-chlorinate the water. De-chlorinator is available in the pet store fish department.

A daily misting or two with chlorine-free water will also be appreciated and will help with humidity. However, care should be taken not to allow the enclosure to become damp. Also, do not mist less than two hours before turning the heat lamps off for the day, as the droplets may not have time to dry and may contribute to respiratory disease.

**SOAKING:** Lizards can benefit greatly from a good deep-water soak at least once a week. A plastic tub makes a good reptile bathtub. Fill the container deep enough so the entire lizard's body can be submerged under water, but the head can be out of water. The water should be nice and warm (about 68-70 degrees). Soak your lizard for about a half hour at a time. This is especially helpful during a bad shed or when your skink might be a bit constipated.

**RECOMMENDED SUPPLIES:**

Cage size should be 5-6 feet long x 2-3 feet deep x 4-6 feet high.	Large dome and 150 watt bulb
under tank heater – placed under same side of tank as basking light	Temperature / humidity gauge – do not stick to side of tank
At least one dry hide house	Coconut fiber substrate, moistened
large water bowl – big enough to soak in	Fluorescent UVB Bulb and housing

**HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT:** Reptiles are ectothermic, or cold-blooded, which means they are dependent on the temperature of their immediate environment to regulate their body temperature. Therefore, we must create an environment with heat gradients – warm on one end and cool on the other. With this set-up, your pet can go to either end depending on whether he needs to be warmer or cooler.

**ENCLOSURE SIZE:** Cage size should be 5-6 feet long x 2-3 feet deep x 4-6 feet high.

Because of the large size requirements for prehensile-tailed skink enclosures AND their need for a higher humidity level, it is often difficult to keep the required humidity level high. Cages often need to be constructed of wood and mesh, therefore allowing humidity to escape easily. Try covering several sides of the cage with Plexiglas or heavy sheet plastic to keep humidity levels high, as a low humidity level can create illness.

Take care to not use toxic substances and supplies while building a prehensile-tailed skink cage. Waterproof wood surfaces with a low-toxin, water based polyurethane. Plywood and plexi are fine to use. If using silicone to seal joints, use only aquarium sealant.

**Be sure to allow more than enough time to allow all products to dry properly to avoid poisoning your new pet.**

**IT IS NOT TRUE THAT A REPTILE WILL ONLY GROW AS LARGE AS ITS ENCLOSURE ALLOWS!!**

**COVER:** Make sure the cage has an escape-proof metal mesh top. It should fit snugly onto the tank and have strong clips locking it on. It is important that the top is METAL mesh, as you will place the heat lamp directly on top of this cover.

**HEAT PAD:** Reptile heat pads can be adhered directly onto the underside of the glass bottom of the tank. Stick the pad on the glass on one of the very far ends of the tank (opposite the water dish). For safety reasons, make sure to attach the rubber feet (contained in the box) at all four corners of the underside of the tank. This will allow air to circulate underneath the tank and prevent the heat from being trapped under the tank. Leave the heat pad ON 24 hours a day.

A human-grade heat pad may be used on the low to medium setting. Do be sure to allow for proper ventilation for safety reasons. **\*\*Be sure to purchase a heat pad without automatic shut-off, which are still available.**

Heat pads specifically manufactured for reptiles and human-grade heat pads are safe to leave on 24 hours a day. **DO NOT** use reptile heat rocks. They heat unevenly and have caused severe thermal burns in reptiles and amphibians.

\*\*\* Although your prehensile-tails will most likely NOT spend much time on the floor of the enclosure, the heat pad will help contribute to the overall humidity and ambient temperature of the enclosure.

**HEAT LAMP:** Place the heat dome with the basking bulb on top of the cage directly over where the reptile heat pad has been placed on the underside of one end of the tank. . The heat lamp should be turned on in the morning, and off at night. (See “Day/Night Light Cycles” below.

**NOTE!!** : Follow directions carefully with all products – **READ THE INSTRUCTION SHEET!!**

Always choose fixtures with ceramic sockets and be careful to choose the socket that is properly rated for the wattage bulb that you will be using. Do not place the fixtures by dry wood or flammable fabrics.

All heaters should be placed out of the reach of children and all pets – including cats and dogs.

Be very careful to make sure that your caged pet cannot reach and touch the heating device in its own cage. A thermal burn to the face or body can be painful and life threatening.

**BASKING AREA:** A warmer basking area matching the temperature listed at the top of this care sheet must be established on the warm side of the cage. This area is directly under the basking bulb and will be higher in the cage for arboreal species. The basking area should be the warmest area in the enclosure. Maintaining the proper temperature in this spot is extremely important to the health of your pet.

**UVB LIGHT:** Exposure to UVB (ultraviolet B) light is critical in allowing an animal to synthesize vitamin D3 in their skin and metabolize calcium in their body.

If an animal is not exposed to an adequate level of UVB light, it will gradually develop physical problems from the result of mineral deficiencies such as low blood calcium (hypocalcaemia), soft eggs (females), stunted growth and metabolic bone

disorder, which can be fatal if left untreated. In addition, recent studies have linked sub-optimal vitamin D levels with poor immune system function.

All day-active (diurnal) indoor reptiles, amphibians, birds and hermit crabs should be allowed self-selected exposure to UVB lighting for up to 8-12 hours a day. This means they should be able to bask in the light but also get away if desired, much as they might in the wild. Many twilight-active (crepuscular) and night-active (nocturnal) species do get some exposure to the sun and may also benefit from low levels of UVB, which helps regulate their photoperiod and vitamin D levels as well.

Please see our additional “UVB Lighting for Companion Birds and Reptiles” for specific instructions for your particular pet and the UVB bulb that we recommend for him or her.

**WATER BOWL:** The large water crock can be placed on the opposite end of the cage, along with another hide house, if desired.

**SUBSTRATE:** We recommend a loose coconut fiber substrate, available in the reptile department and made by several companies. It is made from the husks of coconuts. This substrate is ideal for skinks, as it will help hold humidity in and is also a perfect substrate for plants. Keep the substrate slightly damp, but not watery.

**BRANCHES & PLANTS:** Prehensile-tailed skinks love to climb, and additionally must have a basking area on the warm side of the tank. If you have more than one skink, be sure to create more than one basking area. Choose branches that your skink can climb on safely and lie on comfortably. The basking area can consist of branches and a platform positioned under the basking light so the lizard sits about six inches under the lamp. Sand blasted grape vine branches are available in the pet store; these serve as good sturdy climbing branches. Be careful of bringing in branches from outside, as they can house parasites. Live plants can help increase the humidity in your skink enclosure. Be sure to include only reptile safe plants such as pothos, aloe, philodendrons, spider plants, ficus, and dracena. They can be planted directly into the enclosure substrate.

**TEMPERATURES:** Cage temperatures should be monitored daily and kept at the temperatures listed at the top of this page. Use your reptile thermometer to check the temperatures in different places in the cage regularly to make sure they continually match the listed proper temperatures.

\* If the room temperature falls below 68 degrees at night, a supplemental infrared or ceramic heat fixture may be necessary. (These fixtures do not emit a light spectrum that is visible to the skink, so it will not disturb him at night, but they WILL provide the necessary supplemental heat.)

If your lizard does not receive the proper heat at the proper temperatures along with UVB light, he may become sick with issues such as respiratory disease or MBD and may stop eating, as lizards have a hard time digesting their food without proper heat and light.

**DAY/NIGHT LIGHT CYCLES AND HEATING:** All reptiles must have distinct day and night periods in their enclosure to maintain their biological rhythms. Skinks need 8-12 hours of daytime and 8-12 hours of nighttime. However, as the daylight hours change seasonally outside, daylight hours inside the tank should reflect the same.

**The day period must be light, and the night period must be dark.**

A timer should be used to set day/night periods.

**HABITAT MAINTENANCE:** Daily maintenance should consist of spot cleaning by removing soiled substrate, cleaning water bowl thoroughly and wiping glass clean.

The entire tank should be cleaned thoroughly at least once every couple months with:

- A mild dishwashing liquid (a weak dilution) in warm water, THEN
- Vinegar & water (1:8)  
OR bleach and warm water (1:32)
- Cage “furniture” should also be scrubbed clean with the same dilution.
- RINSE OFF ALL SOAP AND BLEACH THOROUGHLY WITH PLAIN WATER BEFORE RE-INTRODUCING YOUR PET TO ITS ENCLOSURE!!
- NEVER MIX VINEGAR AND BLEACH – IT CREATES A TOXIC SOLUTION.
- NOTE: water used for cleaning does not need to be de-chlorinated, as your pet will not be drinking it or bathing in it.

**GROOMING & HYGIENE:** To reduce the risk of contracting and spreading salmonella poisoning, all handlers should wash their hands after handling any reptile.

**SIGNS OF A HEALTHY ANIMAL:** smooth, even skin; no traces of mites (small, reddish brown spots around nostrils, near ears and eyes); clear eyes, rounded, full body; strong, even, smooth jaw line; bright eyes; regular record of healthy feeding and defecating schedule.

It is very important to keep a journal for each animal that records feeding, refusing, defecation, shedding, unusual behavior, changes in behavior and dates of bulb changes. This will help your veterinarian trouble-shoot any health issues.

We recommend physical exams every year or two years with an exotic pet veterinarian for pet reptiles and amphibians. If your vet sees your pet regularly, many common conditions that afflict pet reptiles and amphibians can be caught and treated early. If not caught early enough or if left untreated, many of these conditions can become far worse if not fatal.

**SIGNS OF ILLNESS:** Irregular scales; small reddish brown spots (mites) around mouth, eye area, ear area; irregular jaw line, 'dents' in mouth with (or without) cottage cheese-like material (mouth rot); cloudy eyes or dull colored body when not in a shed; dark patches on body; thinned body; irregular feeding and defecating habits. Limp, lethargic, sunken eyes; obvious bite marks or wounds from cage mate or prey.  
Red, fluid filled patches may indicate thermal burns.

### **SOME COMMON PROBLEMS INCLUDE:**

<b>HEALTH ISSUE:</b>	<b>SYMPTOMS:</b>	<b>TREATMENT:</b>
<b>Calcium/phosphorus imbalance; MBD</b>	Failure to grow, weakness, limb deformities and fractures, seizures	See exotic pet veterinarian, ensure optimal diet with proper calcium supplementation and UV light
<b>Intestinal parasites (coccidia and pinworms are common)</b>	Failure to grow, loss of appetite, abnormal stools	See exotic pet veterinarian (fecal parasite evaluation and appropriate medication)
<b>Egg binding in females</b>	Abdominal enlargement, decreased appetite, difficulty defecating	See an exotic pet veterinarian immediately.

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