

KEEPING AND BREEDING OF LACERTA SCHREIBERI IN CAPTIVITY

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Introduction

The Iberian emerald lizard (*Lacerta schreiberi*) is a medium sized lacerta (up to 40 cm) from Spain and Portugal. They are typically found in forests or shrublands and are often associated with bodies of water such as streams. They seem to enjoy more humid and temperate conditions than many of the other more commonly kept species of lacerta. In the wild and in captivity *schreiberi* are primarily terrestrial but will climb small shrubs to bask and forage for insects. They are primarily insectivores but will also eat small lizards and fruit when the opportunity presents itself.

Adult *schreiberi* are incredibly beautiful lizards. Both males and females typically sport a blue head although males usually are much brighter. The shade of blue will vary considerably throughout the seasons. Both males and females also have a green body with variable black spots along with brownish tails. However, females tend to have less numerous but larger black spots whereas the males have smaller and more numerous black spotting. Like with other lacerta species, mature males can be distinguished from females by the presence of larger heads, hemipenal bulges, and pronounced femoral pores.

Before the author begins to discuss keeping and breeding this species he would like to make clear that he has only been keeping and breeding for a few years. However, the author has managed to raise a group of *schreiberi* from hatchling size to adult breeders which have then produced healthy babies. The Iberian emerald lizard is a rare and captivating lizard that has great potential in herpetoculture for intermediate to advanced herpetoculturists.

Keeping

The author utilizes a three-pronged approach to keeping *schreiberi* in captivity. From approximately the beginning of May to the beginning of October the lizards are kept in outdoor terraria. The author lives in southern Pennsylvania in the USA. During these months the lizards are exposed to temperatures ranging from 1-38 C (35-100 F). While kept outside it is important that the lizards have access to a dry secluded area in the terrarium where they can retreat from extreme heat and rain. The typical terrarium furnishings of cork bark, branches, soil substrate, and a water bowl are all utilized. Live plants, usually grasses, are also planted in the terraria. The terraria are primarily composed of screen mesh that allows for adequate airflow and light penetration and are oriented toward the south. The terraria measure 76x76x41 cm (30x30x16 in) and the *schreiberi* are kept in male-female pairs.

From approximately the beginning of October until the beginning of January the lizards are placed into small plastic storage containers with enough soil for the lizards to bury themselves. The storage containers are

ventilated by puncturing multiple small holes through the sides. These storage containers are placed in the author's unheated but insulated garage where temperature stays a relatively stable 10 C (50 F) during the winter months. During this time the lizards will hibernate and rarely move. It is important that before the lacertas are hibernated that feeding ceases at least several weeks prior. Usually the animals stop feeding on their own when living outside as temperatures start to decrease.

From approximately the beginning of January until the beginning of May the lacertas are kept in indoor terraria in the author's main facility. During the transition from hibernaculum to terrarium temperatures are increased gradually and food is not offered for at least one week. Eventually the lacertas will become increasingly active, hungry, and ready to breed.

Lacerta schreiberi are primarily insectivores but will also eat fruit based diets as well. The author feeds his adult *schreiberi* every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday as much as they will consume within five minutes. Live crickets, mealworms, superworms, dubia roaches, and silkworms are all readily used and accepted as feeder insects. Like with all insectivorous reptiles it is very important to gutload all feeder insects with a diet of fresh greens, vegetables, and fruits. The author dusts all feeder insects with one either Repashy Calcium Plus, pure calcium powder, or bee pollen. Supplements such as powdered marigold or Repashy SuperPig are also occasionally used and can help the animals to achieve their best and most natural coloration.

Three sources of lighting are utilized when the animals are kept indoors in the Spring. A high output LED light strip is used for visible light and plant growth. A T5HO fixture and bulb (5.0, 6.0, or 10.0 have all been used) is used to provide UVB lighting. Last, a halogen bulb is used to provide heat in the form of a basking spot. The author seeks to achieve a basking spot of approximately 38 C (100 F). The majority of the enclosure can have a much wider temperature range and temperature and lighting choices should be made available for the animals. It is beneficial to provide a strong night time temperature drop even in the Spring and Summer months. While keeping his lacertas indoors the author's main reptile facility ranges from 15-21 C (60-70 F) at night. It should be noted that all three of these light sources are kept outside of the terrarium and that the terrarium should have a fully screen top to achieve strong ventilation.

Fresh water should always be provided in a bowl. Additionally, the author also mists his *schreiberi* terraria in the mornings and evenings to simulate natural humidity cycles. While the increased humidity from these mistings are beneficial it is important to not allow the terraria to become saturated and stagnant.

Breeding

The author observed breeding behavior several weeks after the adult lacertas were removed from hibernation. Breeding behavior observed were the male following the female, regularly resting near her, and eventually copulation. Approximately one month post copulation the females will lay between 6-24 eggs. During or

directly after oviposition females may become protective both toward the male and toward the keeper. The eggs are removed immediately after laying and are incubated externally. The author uses a sealed plastic cup containing perlite and water in a 1:1 ratio. The eggs are cushioned with the perlite and mostly buried with only the tops of the eggs visible. The eggs are incubated at variable temperatures with a significant night time drop. The authors' schreiberi eggs were exposed to temperatures ranging from 20-27 C (69-79 F). Under these conditions the eggs hatched after approximately sixty days. Shorter incubation times have been reported by other breeders.

The young are raised communally in similar terraria to the adults. The main difference in their care is that they are fed as much as they will eat six days a week. It is important to monitor the young so that any slower growing individuals can be removed to receive optimum care. With this care schreiberi will achieve adult size in 12-18 months. Sexual maturity may occur during this time or may be postponed until their second year.

Conclusion

Lacerta schreiberi are incredibly rare in herpetoculture, especially in North America. The author is aware of only one other herpetoculturists working with the species on the continent. The author highly encourages any others working with the species in the USA to contact him so that cooperation can be fostered in establishing this charismatic lizard. The author has found that they are hardy and extremely rewarding lizards to work with as long as a high level of consistent care is provided. The author has even found that captive raised schreiberi are some of the most calm and interactive of all the lacerta species he works with making them excellent candidates for expansion in herpetoculture.

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Images



Adult pair. Male left, female right.



Adult male



Eggs, in process of hatching



Examples of enclosures



Juvenile

Sources

1. Personal communication with John de Jong
2. "Lacerta schreiberi in a Dutch outdoor terrarium" by Harry J.M. Biard
3. <https://uk.inaturalist.org/taxa/35868-Lacerta-schreiberi>