Reptile CARE

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Leopard Geckos
All you need to know about this popular reptile

CITES - what does it all mean?

Going Native - the Viviparous Lizard

Housing, Feeding, Breeding and Much, Much More...
Baby Ridge Tailed Monitors are remarkably good-natured, are tolerant of handling and generally laid back. This more placid nature, and their smaller size make them ideal for the less experience keeper and breeder, not least because they don’t require the large amount of space that their larger cousins demand, but rather a decent sized home vivarium.

A cage with a natural rock background can look very nice and double the usable area for the animals, as can pyramids of ply shelving or ridge tiles, giving hiding, climbing and basking areas. Natural looking rocks can be built with polystyrene sheets cut to natural shapes and coated in PVA glue and silver sand. This can be built up layer upon layer to suite. Fibreglass rocks and backdrops are available commercially and some look extremely good.

They were a joy to maintain and if you intend to breed them it is best to buy 3-5 babies and rear them up together. This will normally give a good chance of a mixed sex ratio, and will intend to breed them it is best to buy 3-5 babies and rear them up together. This will normally give a good chance of a mixed sex ratio, and will usually meant that fighting won’t be a problem.

As the group starts to mature, it is likely that there will be changes in the interactions between certain individuals. There should not be too much aggression, but males will start to experiment with females, and even clamber over other males in a sort of ritualised mating behaviour. Males also appear to scent-mark their territory when females are present by pressing their tails onto the substrate while walking around. As time goes on, true mating will be seen in the characteristic lizard fashion, with the male lying alongside the female, placing his tail under hers until the cloacas match up allowing him to mate with her.

Egg laying normally takes place four to six weeks after mating, but before the female begins to put on weight an egg laying container, which also serves as a hide-box should be introduced for her to become used to. An appropriate medium for her to lay her eggs in, such as silver sand must be kept moist enough so that she can dig exploratory holes without them collapsing. It is sometimes a good idea to place a section of thin slate over two thirds of the surface to slow down evaporation in the high temperatures of the cage, and a layer of damp sphagnum can also be useful.

If you are intending to breed this interesting and attractive creature it is, of course, vital that you carry out full and in-depth research before you get started. With proper preparation, the results can be gratifying and the effort will be well worth it.

Good Breeding

Terry Thatcher gives us the basics behind the rewarding activity of breeding smaller Monitors.
This lizard is better known as the “Common Lizard,” but as it is no longer particularly common, perhaps it is slightly more apt to refer to it by its proper name, the Viviparous Lizard. Certainly it is widespread, being found throughout the British Isles and in certain locales it can indeed be quite common, but over during the latter half of the twentieth century its population has declined catastrophically. It has not been reduced to the undesirable “endangered” status of its larger cousin, the Sand Lizard (see Going Native in issue one of Reptile Care) but it is nevertheless threatened.

As its distribution suggests it has a fairly wide habitat range as it is not dependent on loose well-drained soil (i.e. sand) for refuge, hibernation or incubation and it can be found with the Sand Lizard on heath and dune, but isn’t restricted to this habitat. It does tend to favour South facing banks covered in rank, predominantly grassy vegetation and can also be found on woodland edges and clearings and in open spaces with appropriate foliage. A particular favourite is old brown field sites where the combination of rank vegetation with rubble and numerous interstices in the historically disturbed soil provides excellent habitat. While the Viviparous Lizard is a weak burrower, it is a complete opportunist when it comes to finding and adopting suitable refuges such as under logs or rocks or abandoned rodent burrows. Its primary claim to fame, of course, is that it has live young which is one of its primary adaptations to extreme cold temperatures. This is reflected in the fact that throughout much of its range it can even be found north of the Arctic Circle. The range is itself quite remarkable extending from the Northern extremities of Europe, Southwards as far as the Pyrenees and Eastwards across Asia to the Pacific coast. Yet another of its claims to fame is that it has one of the widest distributions of any of the world’s vertebrates. The range it can even be found north of the Arctic Circle. The range is itself quite remarkable extending from the Northern extremities of Europe, Southwards as far as the Pyrenees and Eastwards across Asia to the Pacific coast. Yet another of its claims to fame is that it has one of the widest distributions of any of the world’s vertebrates. The range it can even be found north of the Arctic Circle. The range is itself quite remarkable extending from the Northern extremities of Europe, Southwards as far as the Pyrenees and Eastwards across Asia to the Pacific coast. 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The range is itself quite remarkable extending from the Northern extremities of Europe, Southwards as far as the Pyrenees and Eastwards across Asia to the Pacific coast. Yet another of its claims to fame is that it has one of the widest distributions of any of the The lizard's prey consists of most small invertebrates. Hunting tends to follow established routes but the sight or sound of a prey item will readily lead to a diversion to seize and eat it. Throughout the summer months they feed avidly - particularly the females who need the additional sustenance to assist in the development of eggs. Depending on the weather, young are produced between the end of June and the beginning of September in a particularly poor summer. The female will seek out a secluded spot - often a hollow in damp vegetation and an average
of around 7-8 young are born, each still wrapped in a membrane which they rupture and emerge from within a day or so, and immediately start hunting for their own food. It is interesting to note that in the extreme south of its range in Northern Spain and the Pyrenees that the Viviparous Lizard is not viviparous at all, but an egg layer.

During September and October the adults prepare for hibernation and are usually in their winter retreat by the end of October, even in the South of England. The young, with much less body mass, are able to warm up under the autumn sun more easily and can remain active well into November. Amazingly enough, little study has been made into this lizard's winter behaviour, but it is presumed to favour hibernation locations underground or under stones or logs in frost free locations. Certainly they have been accidentally found in such locations in the winter months, so it would appear that these animals do have some degree of frost tolerance.

Where it is found, a good healthy colony will include between 300 and 500 individuals of all ages, giving an impression that it is, indeed, common. Conversely, having found such a colony one could travel 50 miles to find another - consequently the term "common" is undoubtedly a misnomer. I have already mentioned the almost catastrophic decline in the population.

In one small area, it is estimated that in just thirty years the existing population is less than 5% of what it was and that the remaining 5% is at risk. To an extent this has been recognised and the Viviparous Lizard, while not as rare as the Sand Lizard and consequently not endangered, is still demonstrably threatened. This is reflected in British law under which it has become an offence for them to be killed, injured, sold or traded in any way in this country.

This has resulted in conditions being placed on Planning Applications whereby lizards must be protected or relocated if they are likely to be killed or injured as a result of the proposed activity. This has at least slowed one of the main reasons for their perilously fast decline.