



Bobtails (also known as Shinglebacks, Sleepy lizards) and bluetongues, they generally grow to a length of around 3550cm depending on which species you choose to keep. All are primarily diurnal, although some are active at night during hot weather.

Depending on where you live these species can be kept indoors or outdoors.

Outdoor Housing

Bluetongues and bobtails are relatively simple to keep. They are best kept outside if it is in an area where they are native.

The enclosure could consist of a fenced off garden area, with the fence extending 50 cm below ground and 80 cm above it. Other alternatives are modified aviaries or small empty swimming pools. The enclosure should receive at least 8 hours of sun each day but always have a shaded area as well. A permanently dry area is very important during periods of wet weather. It is recommended that a shade cloth or bird netting cover be used to exclude predators. Cage furnishings should be kept simple. If they are outside then during winter it is important to provide a layer of leaf litter or dry grass below a rain-proof shelter at one end of the cage so that your lizards can brumate (undergo less activity in a similar way to how some species hibernate). Enclosures must be secure and escape proof.



Indoor Housing

They can also be kept indoors in a smaller enclosure for one or two adults. This would need to be top-ventilated, providing a minimum of 100 x 50 cm of ground





space and provide a basking area heated to about 35°C by a spotlight for several hours each day. It would also require lighting with a full spectrum UV fluorescent tube for 8–12 hours each day. This needs to be tested regularly or replaced at least every six months to maintain its effectiveness. Include a low, flat hide box and leaf litter or dead grass for shelter.



Water

Water can be provided in a very shallow, non-spillable container such as a ceramic bowl. It is important to make sure that they can get out of the water bowl if they go into it.

Food

A variety of foods should be fed including soft and hard fruits and vegetables, daisies and hibiscus flowers, large insects, small mice and some raw meats. Dusting of their food with a calcium/vitamin supplement is recommended. Vary the diet as much as possible to provide a healthy balance. These lizards will eat snails, but be aware of collecting these in areas where poison baits are laid. Feed adults once a week and young individuals every 3 or 4 days.

Captive Behaviour/Breeding

Can be timid at first but will settle and become tolerant of gentle handling. Never hold your lizard upside down and try to always provide something for its feet to contact. After a few days without exposure to humans, some will revert to their natural defensive behaviour of opening mouth and hissing when approached. This generally quickly subsides again. They have small peg-like teeth, but strong jaws.





CAUTION: These lizards can deliver a painful and bloody bite, **if unsure regarding handling please wear PPE gloves.**

Sexing is difficult in these lizards; however we have had good success with utilizing a contrast media and radiographs (x-rays). All have live young generally in late summer or early autumn, with bluetongues generally producing more than four in a litter and bobtails less than this.

Diseases

A clean artificial reptile environment with the appropriate husbandry mentioned above will usually result in your pets remaining healthy. Quarantine newly acquired animals for at least a month before introducing them to those already being kept.

It is recommended that reptiles are checked upon intake as they are very good at hiding illness with symptoms often being very subtle in the early stages.

Flu

Recent research has determined the cause of Bobtail Flu to be a lizard-specific virus, Shingleback Nidovirus 1. It poses a threat to both wild and captive shingleback lizards in Western Australia (*Tiliqua rugosa rugosa*, *Tiliqua rugosa asper*, and *Tiliqua rugosa Konowi*). Shinglebacks infected with the virus also tend to become infected with secondary bacterial, fungal, or parasitic infections, which also may require treatment.

How does the infection occur?

Bobtail flu is very contagious and easily spread between shingleback lizards. More research is necessary to determine if the virus can be spread to other types of reptiles as well; however, it is not known to infect humans.

What are the symptoms to watch out for?

Most bobtails present with classic flu-like symptoms such as weepy eyes, nasal discharge, oral discharge, increased sneezing, lethargy, and weight loss. It is





important to note; however, that some lizards have been found to carry and shed the virus without displaying any signs.

Is it possible to test for the virus?

A new PCR test has been created which can detect Shingleback Nidovirus 1. It simply requires a swab of mucus from the lizard's choana. Further tests may also be performed to detect other causes of respiratory disease in lizards including bacteria, fungus, parasites, allergies, neoplasia, and trauma.

Is there a treatment for "Bobtail Flu"?

Unfortunately, there is no specific treatment for the virus; however, supportive care including anti-inflammatories, fluids, nebulization, and anti-bacterial agents for secondary infections may be warranted. Without supportive treatment, bobtail flu may result in death. On the contrary, with supportive care, success rates are up to 84%. If your lizard is displaying any flu-like symptoms, get the vet to check it.

