

Keeping of Baja blue rock lizard (*Petrosaurus thalassinus* (Cope, 1863)) at BION Terrarium Center

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Petrosaurus thalassinus (Cope, 1863) is a large diurnal lizard from Phrynosomatidae. Males of this species reach total length (including tail) 45 cm (17.72 in). Females are considerably smaller. Body is flattened with small smooth granular scales covering its entire surface. Scales near the tail are slightly keeled. These lizards are famous for their unique coloration. It includes bluish head with areas around the eyes and on the throat colored in orange-red shades. Back is bluish with grey or dark cross-bands, blue spots and streaks. The back of the tail is gray blue with darker cross bars. During breeding season all colors become considerably brighter (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. *P. thalassinus* male during breeding season.

It inhabits rocky slopes across Californian Bay up to 2000 m above sea level. Their distribution area includes ocean coast around Mexican board and number of neighboring islands (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Area of *Petrosaurus thalassinus*.

It is found in the Sierra la Laguna and Sierra la Trinidad of the Cape region of Baja California Sur, as well as on Islas Espiritu Santo and Partida Sur in the Gulf (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baja_blue_rock_lizard). *P. thalassinus* occupies rocky canyons, cliffs, boulder-strewn hillsides and arroyo bottoms. They are often found near big trees which they use for climbing and escaping from predators, generally preferring even those stony areas that have vegetation. Areas with no vegetation are usually ignored.

These lizards prefer temperatures of about 90 F (+32 °C) and bask in direct sunlight on desert cliffs. Their flattened bodies allow them to retreat into rock crevices or on trees very fast to avoid predators and adverse weather conditions. When threatened, the lizard can pull a skin flap along its throat. Like many lizards, it can drop its tail when caught. Young animals are very nimble and fast. They move literally with impressive speed and can escape from the terrarium, taking advantage of the keeper's indiscretion. These lizards sometimes demonstrate ability to regenerate their limbs (Carbajal-Márquez, Valdez-Villavicencio, 2012).

P. thalassinus is listed in IUCN Red List as a species with LC mark, indicating that it is of Least Concern. They are locally protected on several islands and are considered to have no need in special protection. However, its relatively small natural range may make it vulnerable to climate changes and anthropogenic transformation of their environment.

Despite high demand of this species on reptile's market the supply is always limited. We keep *Petrosaurus thalassinus* in BION Terrarium Center since 2006.

Keeping and breeding requirements

Terrarium. We keep adults in pairs (1.1) or individually. Individuals of same sex are quite aggressive towards each other. We use horizontal terrariums of 100*60*50 cm (39.37*23.62*19.68 in) for one pair. Babies and young lizards are kept in terrariums

60*40*40 cm (23.62*15.74*15.74 in). We use mix of sand and clay of 2-3 cm (0.78-1.18 in) depth as substrate. Decoration includes rocks, bark, cork for climbing, artificial rocks from gypsum, basking place and several shelters. Also we provide a moist chamber with sand as and egg-laying place for females. Water dish is needed as well.

Lighting. Full spectrum lamp is used for 14 hours at summer and 8 hours at winter for lighting; 100W incandescent lamp is used as heat source for adults and 60W lamp - for juveniles for 14 hours at summer (depends on the temperature in the terrarium) and 8 hours at winter. Full spectrum Zoo Med lamp "Reptisun UV.10" is used as necessary UVB source.



Figure 3. *Petrosaurus thalassinus* at a decorated terrarium.

Temperature. Daytime temperatures are +26 - +28 °C (78.8 - 82.4 F), at basking place – up to +45 °C (113 F). Nighttime temperature is +20 - +22 °C (68.0 - 71.6 F).

Humidity. During breeding season (February – June) - 70% humidity is achieved by intensively spraying of enclosure with decoration 2 times per day. It is reduced to 50-60% in July.

Diet. Diet for adults includes crickets, cockroaches, zophobas, mealworms. We provide insects 2 times per week by 3-4 pieces per head. Salad (summer version: dandelion, nettle, clover, plantain, leaves of cultivated grapes; winter version: Chinese cabbage, different kinds of green salads, parsley, celery, carrot) is provided 3 times per week. We dust insects with calcium every feeding (especially it's important for babies and gravid females). Reptical vitamin complex is provided once a week for all animals. Repashi or Mineral all once a week.

Males and females reach their sexual maturity around 18-20 months. Their lifespan is about 20 years and probably longer in captivity. Males differ from females due to their

considerably larger heads (comparing with the body), bigger size and presence of femoral pores (Fig. 4).

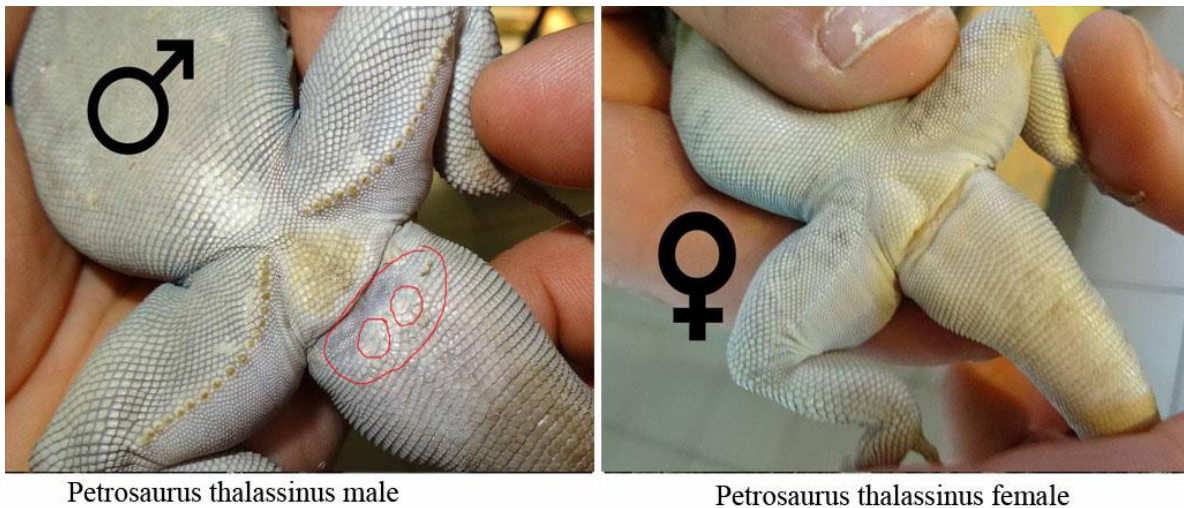


Figure 4. *Petrosaurus thalassinus* male and female.

We keep adult lizards in pairs (1.1), but they are also possible to keep in groups (1.2).

References

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2. www.petrosaurus.nl
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4. Carbajal-Márquez R. A., Valdez-Villavicencio J. H. 2012. *Petrosaurus thalassinus*: Limb regeneration *Herpetological Review* 43(4):649'650
5. <https://reptile-database.reptarium.cz/species?genus=Petrosaurus&species=thalassinus>
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