

Keeping of dwarf shield-tailed agama (*Xenagama taylori* Parker, 1935) at BION Terrarium Center

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The Shield-tailed agama (*Xenagama taylori* Parker, 1935) inhabits desert areas in Somalia and Ethiopia (Fig. 1.).



Figure 1. Distribution of *X. taylori* (<http://agama.su/xenagama-taylori/>).

This species is at present known to inhabit just four localities. Originally discovered in the 1930s on the border between Ethiopia and northern Somalia, where it was found in dry open woodland with a sparse ground-cover of grass and low herbage, it has recently been observed at the adjacent sides of Dargah Bur and Aware in Ethiopia. Here it lives in a flat, semi-desert country (Fig. 2), being active by day and occupying burrows in the sandy soil (Fig. 3), into which it retreats head first when disturbed. Presumably, its broad and extraordinarily spiny tail serves as a very effective deterrent to any predator that might be tempted to follow this lizard into its lair.

These agamas reach 10 cm (4.0 in), including the tail. The tail resembles small «shield», which gives the lizard its English name – «shield-tailed agama» (Fig. 4). They are pretty hardy in captivity in case their needs are properly met. Shield-tailed agamas (*Xenagama taylori*) possess a unique behavior – at night they block with their shield-like tails the entrance of short holes they dig as their shelter. This is their original way of protection against predators.



Photo by Thomas Price

Figure 2. Habitats occupied by *X. taylori* (Largen, Spawls, 2010).



Photo by Thomas Price



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Figure 3. *X. taylori* burrows (Largen, Spawls, 2010).



Figure 4. *X. taylori* subadult specimen.

Keeping and breeding requirements

Terrarium. For adults we use 90*60*60 cm (35*24*24 in) for a breeding group 1.2 or 1.3 (Fig. 5). two males should not be kept together due to aggressive territorial behavior. We use loam mixed with clay (10-12 cm (3.9-4.7 in) as substrate. Another option is keeping the animals without substrate, but provide a box with substrate mentioned above of adequate depth. In such case we place a ceramic plate so that the lizards can reach the substrate surface and dig burrows. Babies (Fig. 6) and juveniles are kept in open plastic boxes of 60*40*30 cm (24*16*12 in) with paper towels as substrate. We also provide paper egg trays as cheap variants of hiding places if numerous animals are kept in laboratory conditions. Potsherds as hiding places are an option as well. Decoration additionally includes decorative rocks and stones to provide hiding and basking places.



Figure 5. *X. taylori* young breeding group.

Lighting. A full spectrum Zoo Med lamp “Reptisun UV.10” is used for up to 14 hours in the summer and 5-6 hours in the winter. A 60W spot lamp is used as a heat source for the same periods of time. UVB light is mandatory. Full spectrum Zoo Med lamp “Reptisun UV.10” is used to provide sufficient amount of UV lighting.

Temperature. At daytime ambient temperature is +28 °C (82.4 °F), at basking place +40 - +45°C (104.0-113.0 °F). At night time temperature drops to +22 - +24 °C (71.6-75.2 °F).



Figure 6. *X. taylori* hatchlings.

Humidity. Humidity is 50-60%. It should be sufficiently dry in the terrarium. But it is necessary to keep moist down the substrate level as to provide the lizards ability to dig their tunnels.

Diet. Diet for adults consists of crickets, cockroaches, zophobas, mealworms, sometimes butterflies of the *Pyrilidae* family of appropriate size. Food is offered every other day by 3-5 insects per head. Also, we offer salad on a daily basis. Summer salad version: dandelion, nettle, hemp, clover, plantain, leaves of cultivated grapes; winter salad version: Chinese cabbage, different kinds of green salads, parsley, celery, carrot. For babies we offer crickets and cockroaches of appropriate size. Food is offered every day by 3-5 insects per head. Salad is given in small quantities daily.

Every feeding, we dust insects with calcium (especially it's important for babies and pregnant females). We use Reptical + D3 or sometimes pure calcium carbonate with UV bulbs. "Mineral all" from Repashi is provided for babies and adults once a week.

References

1. Largen M., Spawls S. 2010. The Amphibians and Reptiles of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Edition chimaira. Hardcover. 693 pp. ISBN 9783899734669.
2. Randall L. Gray. 2003. Desert Lizards: Captive Husbandry and Propagation. Krieger Publishing Company. Malabar. Florida.
3. <http://agama.su/xenagama-taylori/>