

THE HARDY EUROPEAN REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS IN CAPTIVITY (Part 18)

by Andrew Allen

38. Schreiber's Lizard (*Lacerta schreiberi*)

Description.—This elegant lizard grows to 30 cms., having a strong body and thin, lengthy tail. It is green in colour, with many large black patches that are often concentrated into bands. The patches continue onto the belly, thus allowing the species to be readily distinguished from *L. viridis*. The young are uniformly brown, with up to four irregular rows of black-rimmed eyespots.

Distribution.—*L. schreiberi* is confined to the Iberian Peninsula, especially to the South and West of that landmass. It inhabits sunny localities among rocks and stones, on walls, rough slopes, and in woods.

Breeding Habits.—Its breeding habits are similar in most respects to those of *L. viridis*.

Care in Captivity.—On most counts this beautiful animal could be treated similarly to the Green lizard. It is about the same size, comes from similar habitats, has the same enemies and will take similar food.

However, it is probably not equally hardy. Green lizards fare well in Central Europe, whilst Schreiber's lizard is restricted to a very small corner of the extreme South-West of the continent, where the climate is very warm and favourable. Accordingly I would not recommend housing them in outdoor reptiliaries, where they would be at the mercy of every vagary of the British weather. But they should succeed in a greenhouse, provided that this is fully exposed to the sun and has an abundance of well insulated hibernacula.

Indoors it would require a vivarium of similar size and design to that described earlier in the series for *L. viridis*. Abundant space, sun-drenched aspect and artificial heat and light are all imperative. In general not a great deal is known about the requirements of this species, but it is exceptionally attractive and would make a worthy inhabitant of an artistically arranged vivarium.

There are no sub-species.

39. The Eyed Lizard (*Lacerta l. lepida*)

Description.—With lengths of 60 cms. or more, this is easily the largest European lacertid (though not the largest European lizard). It is strongly and heavily built with a powerful head and long tail. Dorsally it is greenish-brown in colour, with a network of green or yellow lines. The flanks are of brighter green, with several large blue patches bounded by black. Ventrally it may be yellow, cream or white, with no markings. The young are initially grey, with brown patches soon developing.

Distribution.—This massive lizard inhabits most of the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, the Iles d'Hyeres, Liguria and Mediterranean France. It favours rough, rocky country and scrub, and may be found up to moderate altitudes.

Breeding Habits.—After mating comparatively late in the spring, the female lays up to ten eggs in holes in the ground or beneath stones.

Care in Captivity.—Because of its great size and semi-hardiness *L. lepida* is not the easiest of lizards to deal with. Its care is a full time job, and not to be lightly undertaken. But given that it is a demanding species, it is also a rewarding one, certainly the most spectacular of the moderately hardy Reptiles.

Indoors it requires space above all else. It is large, it is active, it climbs, it burrows. All this demands a very sizeable vivarium. One of six feet by six feet by four feet would be distinctly cramped for a true pair of these animals. If you can't provide a vivarium of these dimensions or greater—don't attempt to house this species indoors. An interesting alternative to such a bulky vivarium would be to give the lizards the run of an entire escape-proof, carefully heated room. In either event, natural sunlight is an absolute "must", supported by additional heat and illumination. There should be a thick layer of soft soil on the floor, a large water bowl (but a dry atmosphere and good ventilation),

large caves as hiding places, and sturdy branches for climbing.

The lizards can be hibernated by packing them away in a solid, escape-proof wooden box filled with newspaper (a great boon to the herpetologist), dry leaves, straw and moss. The box should be airy, and must be placed in a cool dry location. It should be inspected regularly when spring arrives, so that the inhabitants can be given an immediate drink upon awakening.

The Eyed lizard is of rather suspect hardiness. It is very much a creature of the deep South of Europe, prospering only in really warm climes. On account of this it is not to be recommended for the average outdoor reptiliary. It might live happily in a large reptiliary in the extreme South or West of England, if this was protected from the wind and received an absolute maximum of sunlight. But elsewhere the winters would be too long for such a sensitive animal, and the summers insufficiently hot. If accommodated in a reptiliary it would require some very deep and thoroughly protected hibernating chambers.

On all criteria the ideal home for this species is in a greenhouse. This could easily be of the required dimensions, provides all the sun (and more!) that these lizards relish, and gives a maximum of protection from even our longest and most inclement winters. In an intelligently arranged greenhouse the Eyed lizard could enjoy itself enormously, tame fairly readily, and live for a goodly number of years. But even under exemplary conditions it will still only appear when the sun shines brightly, will retire to hibernate very early and only emerge again when spring is thoroughly established.

In keeping with its size and activity the Eyed lizard has a massive appetite, though under imperfect conditions it is perhaps more liable to go on "hunger strike" than other European lacertids. It will take the usual range of insect fare, though only at the larger end of the scale. This includes mealworms, earthworms, cockroaches, beetles and smooth caterpillars. Any vertebrates smaller than itself will be attacked

and eaten. This includes some frogs, toads and newts, many lizards and snakes, fledgelings, and mammals such as mice. Raw meat may sometimes be accepted, though it should only be held as a standby. Eggs are very popular, and soft fruit of all kinds makes a welcome change from animal fare. If feeding by hand, keep an eye on your fingers. *L. lepida* has a distinctly powerful and painful bite, though not a dangerous one.

Its pugnacity and appetite scarcely recommend it as the perfect community reptile. A safe working rule is to assume that anything smaller, meeker or softer than itself will be eaten or savaged. This doesn't leave it with many possible companions. Large adult Marsh and Edible frogs and Clawed toads should be reasonably safe, as should adults of some Southern sub-species of the common toad. With their virulent poisons and bright warning colours the Fire salamanders are also proof against molestation. Land tortoise, water tortoise and terrapins are ideal companions. I defy any Eyed lizard to make a meal of a tortoise! The only acceptable lizard is the Glass snake (*Ophisaurus apodus*), itself a confirmed cannibal. Several snakes are in the same size range, and are at least potential companions. However, I would hesitate to recommend any in this capacity, for the balance between this predatory lizard and the predatory snakes would be at best a delicate one. A measure of caution is probably indicated.

It is scarcely a major disadvantage that the Eyed lizard can be incorporated into so few communities. It is such a gloriously aristocratic, beautiful, temperamental animal that it is well worth a large vivarium of its own; one where it can occupy permanently the centre of the stage, without the distractions of superficially drabber companions. For those with long experience of the ways of lizards, and a lot of space, money and time it is a magnificent beast that makes the ideal centre-piece in any collection of European Reptilia.

The following article will consider the Wall and Ruin lizards, and some of their numerous relatives.

PRAWNS

by Huw Collingbourne

ALMOST INVISIBLE bodies streaked with wild gashes of brilliant glowing colour glide gently and silently in the brine. Hunched backs stroked by long flowing tendrils characterise one of the strangest, and luckily, most common of the myriad strange inhabitants of the shallow sea.

Often strikingly beautiful in colour. these creatures are easy to keep in a small aerated marine aquarium, and what is more they are easy to breed in large numbers!

I am talking about the common prawn, of course, a misleading name covering numerous different species