



Western New York Herpetological Society

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Common Name: Sheltopusik, European Glass Lizard,
Giant Russian Legless Lizard

Latin name: *Ophisaurus apodus*

Native to: Balkan Peninsula, Turkey, Syria and Caucasus to central Asia

Size: Adults range in size from three to four feet in length weighing 11 to 21 ounces.

Life span: Captive specimens can often live 20 years or more.

General appearance: The first apparent feature of this lizard is the lack of legs. To the untrained eye it can resemble a snake. It does have eyelids, external ears, a large tail and uniform scale size like most other lizards. It is brown to olive green in appearance with a lateral fold that runs the length of the body, but not the tail. The tail often makes up half the length of the lizard. The tail can demonstrate autonomy (breaking) but rarely regenerates the tail back. Fortunately this lizard does not readily drop its tail. *O. apodus* is the only European member of this genus and is the only member that also demonstrates vestigial limbs in the form of spurs near its vent.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure: A 20-gallon long aquarium is the minimum size recommended for these lizards, though larger is often recommended. Hiding places should be provided as well as rocks or branches to provide climbing areas.

Temperature: Daytime temperatures should be maintained between 70° to 85° F. Nighttime temperatures can be maintained approximately 10° F lower at 60° to 75° F.

Heat/Light: Heat can be provided by a number of different means, including red heat bulbs, basking lights, or ceramic emitters. Be sure to provide a photoperiod of approximately 12 hours daily. If using a red heat bulb or ceramic emitter, the photoperiod can be provided with a standard fluorescent bulb. There is no information requiring UVB for these lizards but some natural sunlight may be beneficial for this species.

Substrate: A 50/50 mix of sterilized soil and tropical play sand mix is often the best substrate to use with this species. This will most closely resemble their natural habitat and can usually be easily spot cleaned.

Environment: In the wild, these legless lizards come from a fairly dry environment and often can be found along rocky hillsides with many places available for cover.

Diet: A variety of invertebrates can be offered as food, including crickets, mealworms and earthworms. In addition mice will also be readily accepted. Pinkies or fuzzies are often a good choice but adult mice may also be offered if it is cut into suitable sized pieces for the lizard to eat. Fresh water should be offered daily.

Maintenance: The enclosure should be spot cleaned daily. A thorough cleaning should be performed on a regular basis. A 5% bleach solution is an excellent disinfectant. Be sure to thoroughly rinse the enclosure before replacing the substrate and placing the lizard back in the enclosure.

Other references or recommended reading:

Mattison, Chris. 1992 The Care of Reptiles and Amphibians in Captivity. Blanford Press, London.

Kaplan, Melissa. 1997 *Glass Lizard, Glass Snake, Legless Lizard* Available On-Line:

<http://www.anapsid.org/legless.html>

Flank, Lenny Jr. *Captive Care of the Glass Lizards* Available On-Line:

<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/2421/glassliz.htm>

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This document is for guidance only and should not be used as the sole source of information. New information is being developed daily. It is recommended that a concerted effort be made to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the animals of interest.