Care Sheet:
Falla's skink

Falla's skink (*Oligosoma fallai*)

Adult Size: up to 145mm SVL.

Threat status: 'At Risk – Naturally Uncommon'.

Lifespan: Unknown, though likely to be in excess of 20 years.

Habitat: Lowland forest and scrub, often found associated with Manuka / Kanuka in scrubby or swampy areas.

Permit Level: Insurance population species.

Enclosure:

Minimum recommended enclosure size = 150x70x70cm (LxWxH).

Ideal Group Size:

1:1 (M:F).

**Can also include offspring for their first year, though many keepers prefer to raise them separately*.

Compatible Species:

Duvaucel's geckos (though authorisations usually prohibit the housing of these species with other species).

Recommended Cage Furnishing:

When set-up correctly, Falla's skinks are relatively easy to keep and maintain. In the wild they occupy a range of habitats from the shoreline through into coastal forest and scrub. Within these habitats Falla's skinks usually take refuge under rocks and logs, or in dense vegetation or potentially seabird burrows. These skinks are also relatively arboreal and have been observed climbing coastal trees to considerable heights in the wild. As such, the enclosure should be decorated with live plants and thick branches to allow these skinks the ability to climb. Popular refuge sites in captivity are hollow logs, rock piles, hollow bamboo / polythene pipe (of an appropriate size for large skinks, and stacks of Onduline or timber boards with spacers large enough to allow these skinks to squeeze into the gaps. Most plants are unlikely to provide a suitable structure for these relatively heavy skinks to climb on, so the focus should be on selecting species which may either provide a source of food (berries) or dense cover (shade or thick vegetation to hide in). For their size, Falla's skinks are a fast and agile species so avoid placing cage furnishing near the door of

the enclosure to minimise the risk of skinks rushing out or using furnishings as a ramp to climb / jump out of the opening.

Breeding:

It is recommended that this species be held in pairs, but they may be held in small groups in enclosures which are densely planted and provide individuals with ample opportunity to avoid one another. Mating generally occurs in early autumn, and up to six young are born between summer and autumn the following year. It is recommended to remove the young as soon as they are sited to avoid the risk of cannibalism from larger adults.

Diet:

Falla's skinks are very predatory skinks and consume a wide variety of insects including flies, moths, beetles, large spiders, crickets, grasshoppers and locusts. These insects can be wild caught or captive-bred, although reptile nutrient supplements will need to be added to captive-bred insects. Being one of New Zealand's largest skinks it is likely that Falla's skinks also consume smaller lizards and living around seabird colonies they likely also consume regurgitated fish from seabirds feeding their chicks. As such, their captive diet may be supplemented with such items as egg, fish or mince, though these should only be used sparingly as overfeeding with these food items can cause obesity and other more serious health issues. Falla's skinks are also fond of sweet fruit mixtures (Fruit puree, mashed banana etc.) in captivity, and presumably consume the fruit from a range of native plant species in the wild. Kawakawa (*Piper excelsum*) is one species that has proven to be popular for larger species of skinks (including Falla's skinks) in captivity.

Notes:

- Falla's skinks are one of New Zealand's largest skinks so require somewhat larger prey items than other smaller species.
- Falla's skinks are cathemeral (active whenever conditions are suitable), and while they are avid sun-baskers, they are equally as likely to be seen out and about / foraging at night.
- They are a relatively more nervous / timid skink compared to other species of large diurnal skinks (e.g. Grand, Otago and Scree skinks), and will often quickly retreat when approached.
- Falla's skinks are very prone to tail-loss so handling should be minimised to avoid the risk of autotomy.
- They are a fast-moving species and will take full-advantage of a carelessly opened enclosure door. Because of this it is recommended that enclosures are designed to incorporate a 'lip' around the door which minimises the risk of these skinks escaping, and not placing any enclosure furnishings in this area which may provide the skinks with an opportunity to jump / climb out.