

# Fire-Bellied Skink (*Mochlus fernandi*) Care Guide

## Overview

- **Common Name:** Fire-Bellied Skink
- **Scientific Name:** *Mochlus fernandi*
- **Origin:** West & Central Africa (Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon)
- **Size:** 12–15 inches (including tail)
- **Lifespan:** 15–20+ years (with proper care)
- **Temperament:** Generally docile, shy, can become very tame

These are **terrestrial, semi-fossorial skinks** known for their bright red/orange belly and smooth, glossy scales.

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## Enclosure Setup

### Tank Size

- **Minimum:** 40-gallon breeder (for one adult)
- **Recommended:** 4 ft x 2 ft enclosure (larger is better)

### Substrate (Very Important)

Fire-bellied skinks **love to burrow**.

- Ideal depth: **4–6 inches minimum**
- Good substrate mixes:
  - Organic topsoil + play sand (70/30)
  - Coconut fiber + soil
- Must hold moisture but not be soggy

### Decor & Enrichment

- Cork bark hides (multiple)
- Leaf litter (helps mimic natural habitat)
- Branches and logs
- Rocks (securely placed)

They spend a lot of time **under cover**, so clutter is beneficial.

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## Temperature & Heating

### Temperature Gradient

- **Basking spot:** 90–95°F
- **Warm side:** 80–85°F
- **Cool side:** 75–78°F
- **Night temps:** Can drop to 70–72°F

### Heating Equipment

- Halogen basking bulb (preferred)
  - Ceramic heat emitter (if needed at night)
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## Lighting

- **UVB:** Recommended (not optional for best health)
    - Use 5.0–7% UVB tube
    - Place over basking area
  - **Photoperiod:** 10–12 hours daily
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## Humidity

- Target: **60–80%**
- Maintain with:
  - Moist substrate
  - Occasional misting
  - Large water dish

### Tip:

Keep **one side slightly drier** to prevent mold.

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## Diet

### Staple Diet (Insectivorous)

- Crickets
- Dubia roaches
- Black soldier fly larvae
- Mealworms (in moderation)
- Superworms (occasionally)

## Feeding Schedule

- Adults: **2–3 times per week**
- Juveniles: **every other day**

## Supplementation

- Calcium (no D3): 2–3x per week
  - Calcium with D3: 1x per week
  - Multivitamin: 1x weekly
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## Water

- Provide a **shallow water dish at all times**
  - They may soak occasionally
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## Behavior & Handling

- Naturally **shy and burrow often**
- Will become tame with consistent, gentle handling
- Rarely aggressive; may:
  - Flee
  - Burrow
  - Musk (rare)

## Handling Tips

- Support the whole body
  - Avoid grabbing from above (triggers prey response)
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## Shedding

- Occurs regularly in healthy individuals
- Signs:
  - Dull coloration
  - Reduced activity

### **Help with shedding:**

- Maintain humidity
  - Provide rough surfaces
  - Occasional light misting
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## **Health & Common Issues**

### **Healthy Signs**

- Bright, smooth scales
- Clear eyes
- Strong feeding response
- Regular burrowing

### **Common Problems**

- **Dehydration:** Wrinkled skin, lethargy
  - **Shedding issues:** Low humidity
  - **Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD):** Lack of calcium/UVB
  - **Parasites:** Especially in wild-caught individuals
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## **Breeding (Optional)**

- Live-bearing species (gives birth to live young)
  - Typically 3–12 babies per litter
  - Requires:
    - Seasonal cycling (cooler temps)
    - Well-conditioned adults
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## **Key Care Tips**

- Deep substrate is **non-negotiable**

- They are **display animals less often than burrowers**
- Consistent humidity is critical
- UVB greatly improves long-term health
- Avoid overly dry or sterile setups