Recommended Annual Husbandry Schedule

Hoplocercus spinosus - Spiny weapontail

Range and taxonomy
The only living species in Hoplocercus, occurring in Brazil and eastern Bolivia from about 100-600 m. The accepted name is H. spinosus, not ‘spinulosus’. It is terrestrial and oviparous.

Habitat and activity
Cerrado and adjoining Cerrado-forest mosaics. It digs 30-40 cm ground burrows with 2-4 cm entrances, remains below ground by day and emerges at dusk. The short spiny tail is used to block the tunnel entrance.

Diet and conservation
Wild prey include termites, beetles, spiders, scorpions, grasshoppers, millipedes and ants. The species is currently assessed as IUCN Least Concern, but captive husbandry and breeding evidence remain limited.

Month	Day ambient	Night	Basking surface	UVI	Photoperiod	Lamp hours	Surface / retreat RH	Adult feeding	Seasonal management
Jan	25-26 C	18-20 C	32-34 C	1-2	11 h	4 h	35-45 / 55-70%	1-2 feeds	Mild slowdown
Feb	26-27 C	19-21 C	33-35 C	1-2	11.5 h	5 h	35-50 / 55-70%	2-3 feeds	Activity resumes
Mar	27-28 C	20-22 C	34-36 C	2	12 h	6 h	45-60 / 60-75%	3-4 feeds	Pre-breeding ramp
Apr	28-29 C	21-23 C	35-37 C	2-3	12.5 h	7 h	55-70 / 70-85%	4 feeds	Pairing / mating
May	28-29 C	22-23 C	35-37 C	2-3	13 h	8 h	60-75 / 70-85%	4 feeds	Mating / follicles
Jun	28-29 C	22-24 C	36-38 C	2-3	13 h	8 h	65-80 / 75-90%	4 feeds	Laying possible
Jul	28-29 C	22-24 C	36-38 C	2-3	13 h	8 h	65-80 / 75-90%	4 feeds	Laying / recovery
Aug	28-29 C	22-24 C	36-38 C	2-3	13 h	8 h	65-80 / 75-90%	4 feeds	Laying possible
Sep	28-29 C	22-24 C	36-38 C	2-3	12.5 h	7 h	60-75 / 70-85%	3-4 feeds	Late laying / recovery
Oct	27-28 C	21-23 C	35-37 C	2	12 h	6 h	50-65 / 65-80%	3 feeds	Season winds down
Nov	26-27 C	20-22 C	34-36 C	1-2	11.5 h	5 h	40-55 / 60-75%	2-3 feeds	Taper
Dec	25-26 C	19-20 C	33-35 C	1-2	11 h	4 h	35-45 / 55-70%	1-2 feeds	Mild slowdown

Operating note: these are conservative captive starting points, not published species standards. Change temperatures gradually and revise them from measured enclosure gradients, body mass, appetite, faecal output and behaviour. The basking site must always be escapable.

Rainfall note: outdoor millimetres of rain cannot be translated directly into enclosure spraying. The table therefore uses measured surface and burrow humidity gradients. During the wet season, use short evening-biased rain events with strong air exchange; never keep the entire deep substrate saturated.

Practical Husbandry and Daily Management

A dusk-emerging Cerrado burrow specialist whose welfare depends on deep, stable soil and a protected below-ground microclimate.

Enclosure, burrow and substrate

Use at least **120 x 60 x 70 cm for one adult**, with 150 x 75 x 90 cm preferred where substrate weight can be supported. Provide **35-45 cm of cohesive sandy loam** so the animal can reproduce its documented 30-40 cm burrow depth. A deeper bank at one end is preferable to a shallow uniform layer.

Mix mineral soil with enough clay to hold a tunnel, but prevent compaction into concrete. Support every heavy branch, slab or stone from the enclosure floor. Offer starter tunnels beneath cork or flat slabs, plus leaf litter and low cover at the surface. Check burrow stability without collapsing occupied tunnels.

Heat, light and UVB

During full activity provide warm-side air around **28-29 C**, a cooler zone around **24-26 C** and a broad surface basking area around **35-38 C**. The burrow must remain cooler and stable. Do not force daytime emergence to obtain heat.

Use bright visible light with shaded ground routes. Target measured **UVI 2-3** at the optional basking area and below UVI 1 at the usual emergence route. Keep heat and UV available into late afternoon, then provide a dim dusk transition before darkness.

Water, humidity and rain

Keep shallow fresh water available. Maintain a dry-to-moderate surface during the dry season but a reliably humid burrow depth. In the wet season, use short evening rain events and let the surface partially dry between them; saturated anaerobic soil or a wet sleeping chamber is unsafe.

Diet and feeding

Rotate small-to-medium captive-bred invertebrates that reflect the documented wild diet: termites where safely cultured, beetles and larvae, roaches, crickets, locusts, spiders only from controlled sources, and occasional isopods or millipedes known to be non-toxic. Never offer wild scorpions or pesticide-exposed prey.

Offer adults three to four modest feeds weekly during full activity, placed shortly before dusk near the emergence route. Reduce to one or two feeds during the mild dry-season slowdown. Dust most insect meals lightly with plain calcium and use D3 or multivitamins conservatively according to measured UVB and veterinary guidance.

Social and handling

House singly unless a specific pairing is being supervised. Its non-autotomic, spiny tail is a defensive structure; never pull or restrain it by the tail. Use a secure transfer box and minimise destructive burrow excavation. Separate immediately for biting, blocked burrows, food exclusion or sustained pursuit.

Daily keeper checks

Check	Record
Activity	Emergence, basking, cover use, digging and abnormal hiding
Feeding	Prey offered, intake, strike accuracy and regurgitation
Condition	Mass trend, jaw, eyes, skin, toes, abdomen and faeces
Environment	Hotspot surface, warm/cool air, UVI, water and substrate gradient

Veterinary triggers

Seek reptile-veterinary assessment for persistent anorexia, marked weight loss, jaw swelling, weakness, abnormal breathing, bite wounds, repeated unproductive digging, retained eggs or failure to use heat normally. Quarantine and faecal screening are prudent for all new animals.

Breeding, Nesting and Evidence Review

The species is oviparous, but direct captive breeding evidence is sparse; use the programme to create reliable individual records rather than chasing production.

Seasonal breeding management

Use an 8-10 week mild dry-season slowdown without true brumation, lights-out or cold-room temperatures. From February-March, increase night temperature, food and evening rain gradually. Pair only fully active animals with stable mass and normal faecal results.

Use adjacent enclosures or a divided neutral enclosure before direct contact. Introduce under observation in the late afternoon. End the session for biting, pinning, sustained pursuit, tunnel blocking or prolonged refusal to emerge. Never assume a pair can remain together overnight.

Nest provision

The normal deep substrate should include a private **35-45 cm** laying bank with a warm upper zone and a cooler, humid depth. Provide more than one covered entrance. Avoid repeated probing; observe digging and body-mass change remotely where possible.

After laying, separate and weigh the female, restore access to water, heat and calcium-supported food, and assess recovery. Repeated unproductive digging, lethargy, swelling or declining condition warrants prompt imaging and reptile-veterinary care.

Eggs and incubation

A global clutch-size dataset lists H. spinosus as variable with a mean around **four eggs**, but incubation details remain poorly documented. Treat each clutch as an evidence-building case and preserve egg orientation.

Use **26-28 C** only as a cautious first incubation range, in lightly damp vermiculite or perlite with no free water touching eggs. Use a calibrated logger and record egg mass, shell appearance and condensation. No dependable species-specific incubation-duration range is yet established.

Evidence confidence

Topic	Confidence and application
Taxonomy / range	High: current Reptile Database and systematic revision
Habitat / diet	High-moderate: systematic review and field synthesis
Burrow / activity	High-moderate: documented depth and dusk emergence
Captive climate	Moderate-low: facility starting points derived from ecology
Clutch / incubation	Low-moderate / low: clutch dataset; incubation unvalidated

Source corrections applied

The filename and document name were corrected from Hoplocercus spinulosus to the accepted H. spinosus. Outdoor rainfall millimetres were converted to usable surface/burrow humidity goals. Photoperiod amplitude was moderated for a low-latitude species, and the daytime basking model was adjusted for documented daytime burrow use and dusk emergence.

Record set for every breeding attempt

Individual IDs; provenance; dates of seasonal changes; weekly mass; feeding and emergence time; rain events; burrow temperature/RH logger export; introduction and aggression log; courtship or mating; first digging; laying date and clutch data; egg dimensions and mass; incubator/media details; fertility; hatch date; neonatal mass; post-lay recovery and complications.

Key references

1. Uetz, P. et al. (eds.). The Reptile Database: Hoplocercus spinosus. Accepted name, taxonomy, range and oviparity; accessed 22 September 2026.

2. Torres-Carvajal, O., Etheridge, R. & de Queiroz, K. (2011). A systematic revision of Neotropical lizards in the clade Hoplocercinae. Zootaxa 2752:1-44. Distribution, morphology, burrow depth, dusk activity and diet.

3. Meiri, S. et al. (2020). The global diversity and distribution of lizard clutch sizes. Global Ecology and Biogeography dataset. Reproductive mode and clutch-size summary.

4. Caiaffa, M.G. et al. (2025). Spiny weapontail (Hoplocercus spinosus) hematology and chemistry values. Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine 56(4). Conservation status and clinical reference context.

UVI beneath the optional T5 tube

Hoplocercus spinosus

Your measuring point

Measure UVI at normal back height directly beneath the brightest accessible part of the optional T5 strip. Place the strip toward the middle/back with free access to and away from it; preserve a gradient into fully covered refuges near UVI 0. These numbers describe the exposure area, not the whole enclosure or a daily average.

Measure and adjust

1. Use a UV Index meter. A Solarmeter 6.5/6.5R or equivalent UVI meter is suitable. Broadband UVB readings in microwatts/cm2 cannot be substituted for UVI.

2. Measure the installed arrangement. Warm the tube for about 30 minutes. Keep the reflector, guards and mesh in their normal positions. With the animal elsewhere, hold the sensor at its normal back height, aimed toward the tube.

3. Adjust the fixture. Begin near the lower part of a newly selected working range and adjust gradually. Respect the lamp manufacturer's minimum distance. Recheck after each change and check every higher accessible branch, rock or platform.

4. Keep a full gradient. Provide usable exposure across the animal's body, lower-UVI areas and fully covered refuges near UVI 0. For daytime baskers, overlap the UV area with visible light and appropriate basking warmth while retaining cooler shade.

5. Record and recheck. Log UVI, measuring point, tube-to-back distance, tube age and lamp-on time. Recheck through the year and after changes to the tube, reflector, mesh or furnishings. Exposure duration and behaviour also determine dose.

A T5 range is a working exposure target, not a whole-cage setting, measured wild monthly average, guaranteed optimum or proven safety ceiling. The animal must be able to enter and leave freely.

Monthly target at normal back height

Month	UVI under T5 when on
January	1-2
February	1-2
March	2
April	2-3
May	2-3
June	2-3
July	2-3
August	2-3
September	2-3
October	2
November	1-2
December	1-2

Retain numbers; clarify measurement
The retained range remains a provisional captive working target. No new species-specific result was found that clearly requires a numerical change. Retaining it is not certification of an experimentally established optimum.

Evidence level: Provisional retention. The seasonal schedule is a captive operating plan; it is not measured wild monthly UV. Off means the existing planned UVB-off/rest phase is preserved. Any staged Off/1 entry still means gradual reintroduction.

UV references: Baines et al. (2016), UV-Tool; Muryn, Baines and Dishman (2026), Reptile Lighting Guide V10. Full rationale and monthly comparison: UVI_Audit_Report.html.