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AGAMAS

Chinese Water Dragon

Physignathus cocincinus

Physignathus cocincinus is a large, green, semi-aquatic agamid from wooded streams in South-East Asia. It grows to about 90 cm, of which more than two thirds is tail. The species is diurnal, climbs and dives, and needs a very large, tall and humid enclosure with a deep water section, strong UVB and a warm basking spot. A large share of the animals in the trade are wild-caught.

Family: Agamidae Former name: *Dilophyrus mentager* Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**70-90 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**250-600 g**
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and semi-aquatic**
Habitat	**Rainforest and wetland**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**180 × 90 × 180 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**25-30 °C**
Basking spot	**35-40 °C**
Temperature, night	**21-24 °C**
Humidity	**60-80%**
Water	**Water section** depth 15-30 cm
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, plants and vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**5-18 eggs**
Incubation	**60-75 days** at 29-31 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Vulnerable (VU)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE

A single adult needs an enclosure of at least 180 × 90 × 180 cm (length × width × height). The species is large and active, climbs and swims, and in a smaller enclosure it becomes stressed and injures itself.

TEMPERATURE

The basking spot should be 35-40 °C, measured with a digital thermometer on the branch itself. Recommendations vary from about 32 to about 50 °C, and young animals do best at the low end. The air at the cool end should be 25-28 °C.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity should be 60-80 %, highest in the morning (about 75-80 %) and lower in the evening (about 50-60 %). This is achieved with 1-2 daily mistings or an automatic rain system, a damp substrate and a large water section.

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

The water section must be large enough for the animal to dive and swim: at least 15 cm deep, preferably more, and it should cover a third to a half of the floor.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal and needs strong UVB corresponding to Ferguson zone 3. Use a T5 HO tube with 10-12 % UVB in a reflective fitting on the same side as the heat lamps.

FEEDING

Physignathus cocincinus is omnivorous, but lives mostly on insects. Young animals eat almost only insects, and plants are added with age. Hatchlings under 3 months: small crickets every day.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Physignathus cocincinus is shy and sensitive to stress, especially wild-caught animals. Let a new animal settle in without handling, and then begin feeding from tweezers so the animal comes to you.

NATIVE RANGE

China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand.