herpy

AGAMAS

Mwanza Flat-headed Agama

Agama mwanzae

Agama mwanzae is a diurnal rock agama from the savanna and semi-desert of East Africa. The dominant male has a dark blue body and a red or violet head, neck and shoulders. The species is fast and a good climber, and it needs a spacious, dry enclosure with a very hot basking spot and strong UVB.

Family: Agamidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**15-23 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**15 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Semi-desert, savanna and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**90 × 60 × 60 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**28-35 °C**
Basking spot	**40-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-24 °C**
Humidity	**20-40%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects**
Kept	**Singly or one male with several females**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**5-7 eggs**
Incubation	**60-90 days** at 26-29 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Not listed**
EU annex	**Not listed**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

About the species

Agama mwanzae is a medium-sized, flat-headed rock agama. The dominant male has a dark blue body and a red or violet head, neck and shoulders; the female is brown and hard to tell apart from the females of other agamas. The male's colours disappear when he is stressed, cold or subordinate, and he then looks like a female. It is the male's colours that have made the species popular as a terrarium animal.

Adults reach 15-23 cm including the tail.

The species was described in 1923 as a variety of *Agama lionotus*, has since been treated as a subspecies of *Agama agama* and *Agama planiceps*, and has been regarded as a separate species since 1991. It is often confused with *Agama agama*.

A. mwanzae is fast and wary, and an animal to watch, not to pick up. It can be accustomed to brief handling, but does not seek contact. It can live for up to 15 years.

Distribution and habitat

Agama mwanzae lives in East Africa: in Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda. The type locality is Shanwa near Mwanza on Lake Victoria in north-western Tanzania, and the species is seen in, among other places, the Serengeti and the Masai Mara.

> **Native range:** Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda.

HABITAT

Agama mwanzae lives in savanna and semi-desert, where it basks in the midday heat on rocks and kopjes, the granite outcrops that rise from the plain. The rocks provide a lookout and crevices to flee into.

The species is diurnal and lives in groups with one dominant, highly territorial male and several females, often about five. Subordinate males have muted colours. When the male courts a female, he nods and bobs his head.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

Agama mwanzae is kept and bred in captivity, but its care is only sparsely described. The figures for breeding are borrowed from the closely related *Agama agama*.

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 90 × 60 × 60 cm (length × width × height). A male with two females needs at least 120 × 60 × 60 cm. The species climbs well on rocks and vertical surfaces, so the enclosure should have rock structures that reach up high, but floor area is what matters most.

Use a substrate 5-8 cm deep of sand mixed with a little soil. Furnish with slate slabs, flat stones and cork so that the animal can climb up and keep watch and has hiding places in several temperature zones. Everything must be firmly fixed. The lid must provide good ventilation and be lockable, because the animal is fast. Remove uneaten insects before the light is switched off.

TEMPERATURE

Agama mwanzae needs a clear gradient. The basking spot should have a surface temperature of 40-45 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer. The warm end of the enclosure should be 30-35 °C and the cool end about 28 °C. Use a halogen spotlight over a flat stone or slate slab, and put a thermostat on all heat sources.

At night the lamps are switched off, and the temperature may fall to 20-24 °C. If the room is colder, use a ceramic heater on a thermostat, which gives no light. Temperatures that are too low cause poor digestion and respiratory infections, and the male loses his colours.

Read more: Heat and temperature

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Air humidity should be 20-40 %. Always keep a low, stable bowl of fresh water in the enclosure, and change the water daily, because the species drinks a lot. Mist the walls lightly once or twice a week so that the animal can also drink droplets. Air that is too dry causes problems with shedding, especially on the toes and tail tip; a corner with damp substrate helps during shedding.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

Agama mwanzae is diurnal and basks a great deal, so it needs strong light and UVB corresponding to Ferguson zone 3. Use a T5 HO tube of 10-12 % in a reflective fitting over the basking spot and the warm half of the enclosure. The distance from tube to basking spot depends on the lamp and mesh; check with a UV meter. The cool end should have shade.

Give 12 hours of light a day controlled by a timer. UVB tubes lose their effect long before the light visibly weakens, so replace them according to the manufacturer's instructions, usually every 12 months.

Read more: Lighting and UVB

FEEDING

Agama mwanzae is an insectivore. Offer a varied diet of well-fed insects: cockroaches and crickets as the staple, and mealworms and superworms in smaller amounts. Fatty insects such as waxworms are for treats only. The insects should be no larger than the distance between the animal's eyes.

Feed juveniles daily and adults three times a week so that they do not become fat. Dust the insects with calcium without D3 at every feeding when the UVB lighting is in order, and give a vitamin supplement with D3 every other week. A little greenery such as dandelion leaves can be offered.

Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Agama mwanzae is fast, wary and territorial. Two males must never be kept together, because they fight and inflict serious injuries on each other. One male can be kept with one or two females in a large enclosure with many hiding places, so that the females can avoid him. A male that can see another male may lose his colours and stop eating.

The species can be accustomed to brief, calm handling, but does not seek contact, and it is so fast that it easily escapes. Never grab the animal by the tail: agamas cannot shed their tails, and a damaged tail does not regrow. An animal with good hiding places and climbing rocks is calmer and shows more colour.

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

The male *Agama mwanzae* has a blue body and a red or violet head, while the female is brown. The sex is easy to see in adults and harder in juveniles. Age at sexual maturity is not documented for the species; in *Agama agama* the females are sexually mature after 14-18 months and the males after about two years. Do not put a female into breeding until she is fully grown and in good condition.

MATING

The male nods and bobs his head to court the female. Introduce the male to the females in a large enclosure with many hiding places, so that the females can avoid him, and keep watch: separate the animals if a female gets wounds or stops eating. Breeding succeeds with varying luck.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

A female with eggs becomes visibly rounder. Give her a laying box with 10-15 cm of slightly damp sand or coconut fibre where she can dig. Clutch size is not documented for the species; in *Agama agama* it is 5-7 eggs. Without a suitable place the female may retain the eggs, and this can become life-threatening. Give her plenty of food and calcium before and after laying, and preferably keep her apart from the male while she is carrying eggs.

INCUBATION

Lift the eggs out carefully without turning them, and place them in slightly damp vermiculite in an incubator. At about 29 °C they hatch after 2-3 months (60-90 days). In *Agama agama* the incubation temperature determines the sex: 29 °C gives males and 26-27 °C females. Whether the same applies to *A. mwanzae* is not documented, but keep the temperature stable.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

Keep the young apart from the adults in an enclosure with the same furnishings, many hiding places and UVB. Feed daily with small insects dusted with calcium. Separate the males from each other in good time, because they become territorial.

Health and common mistakes

Most illnesses in *Agama mwanzae* are caused by faults in care. Typical problems are:

- Metabolic bone disease from too little UVB and calcium. The signs are tremors, soft bones and deformed jaws.
- Shedding problems from air that is too dry, especially on the toes and tail tip.
- Respiratory infection from temperatures that are too low: wheezing breathing, mucus at the nostrils and an open mouth.
- Obesity from too many fatty insects and too little exercise.
- Intestinal worms, mites and other parasites. Wild-caught animals often carry many, so quarantine new animals and have a faecal sample examined.

A healthy animal has clear eyes, a plump tail and smooth skin and eats willingly. Contact a vet with experience in reptiles if the animal loses weight, does not eat or breathes with an open mouth.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene Read more: Common diseases and signs of illness Read more: Buying animals: captive-bred, wild-caught and transport

Always ask someone who knows

This guide is a good place to start, but it cannot replace experience. Animals differ, and much of what matters most is learned from people who have kept the species for years. Talk to a breeder, an experienced keeper or a vet who knows reptiles and amphibians before you get the animal - and again if anything looks wrong.

The full guide with map and updates: herpy.org/en/agamas/agama-mwanzae