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MONITOR LIZARDS

Kimberley Rock Monitor

Varanus glauerti

A slender, long-legged rock monitor from the Kimberley in north-western Australia, with a dark head, blue-grey eye-spots on the back and a tail with sharp black and white bands. *Varanus glauerti* only reaches 60-80 cm, but it is demanding: it needs a large, warm and tall enclosure with rock surfaces and crevices, and the keeper must have experience with UVB, egg incubation and timid animals.

Family: Varanidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**60-80 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**15-20 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and rock-dwelling**
Habitat	**Savanna and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**150 × 80 × 100 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**26-32 °C**
Basking spot	**45-55 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**50-80%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects and vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**3-9 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-4**
Incubation	**104-110 days** at 28.5-29.5 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

About the species

Varanus glauerti is a medium-sized, smooth, slender monitor with a flat head, long legs and a long, slightly compressed tail. The head, neck and forebody are dark and unpatterned. The back is almost black with transverse rows of blue-grey ocelli, and the tail has distinct black and white bands. Animals from the southern part of the range are more yellowish than those from the north. The name honours Ludwig Glauert (1879-1963), a British-born geologist and palaeontologist who emigrated to Western Australia and later became museum director in Perth.

The species belongs to the subgenus *Odatria*, the dwarf monitors, and is one of several rock-dwelling species. Adults are typically 60-80 cm including the tail, and a few animals grow larger. The body is only about 20 cm from snout to vent in an animal of 60 cm, so about two thirds of the length is tail. The flat snout and long legs are used to squeeze into narrow crevices.

The taxonomy is in flux. In 2026 the populations in the north-western Northern Territory were described as a new species, *V. fyfei*, and within *V. glauerti* there are two lineages, one in the eastern and one in the western Kimberley. The two lineages also differ in pattern and size. Which lineage individual animals in the trade belong to is rarely known.

The temperament is timid, especially in the first months. Animals that have been handled from a young age become calm and curious in time. The species rarely bites, but it is fast and flees into every crevice it can find.

An adult can live 15-20 years and needs a large enclosure for life, with strong heat and UVB, which cost electricity and new light sources. The food bill is modest, because the animal lives mostly on insects, but the care and the live feeder animals take time every day. The species is still rare in the trade and not something to buy on impulse.

Read more: Lighting and UVB Read more: Feeder animals: keeping and breeding

Distribution and habitat

Varanus glauerti is found in the Kimberley in northern Western Australia, in both the eastern and the western part. The type locality is Wotjulum in the western Kimberley. The populations in the north-western Northern Territory, which were previously counted as part of the species, were described in 2026 as the closely related *V. fyfei*. Where the boundary between the two lineages runs in the central Kimberley has not yet been mapped. Older records from Timor are not confirmed.

> **Native range:** Australia.

HABITAT

The species lives on rocky terrain: rock faces, mountain slopes, crevices and scree in a tropical climate with a distinct wet season and a long dry season. It climbs on rock faces and in trees and uses crevices and hollows as shelter and for sleeping at night. The animal is diurnal and basks before it goes hunting for insects, other invertebrates, small lizards and lizard eggs.

The wet and dry seasons alternate, and the temperature is high for most of the year. There are big differences between sunlit rock faces and cool, shady crevices. The enclosure must be able to imitate that gradient.

Care

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 150 × 80 × 100 cm (length × width × height). A pair should preferably have 190 × 100 × 105 cm. Bigger is better, because the animal climbs, runs and needs a clear temperature gradient. Wood or PVC holds heat better than glass. Hatchlings can start in a smaller box of about 60 × 40 × 40 cm with at most four animals in each and be moved up as they grow.

The floor is 15 cm or more of sand mixed with topsoil, e.g. three parts sand to one part topsoil. The species digs, and a substrate that is too soft can cause twisting and injuries to the claws, so preferably lay a layer of coarser bark on top. Fix cork panels to the walls, and build rock-like stacks of stone and cork with narrow crevices where the animal can squeeze in. Add many branches and hollow cork tubes at different heights. All stones and branches must be stable so that they cannot topple onto the animal.

The doors must be tight, because the animal squeezes into the smallest gap. Heat sources must be placed outside the enclosure or behind a protective grille so that the animal cannot burn itself. Change the substrate at least once a month.

Read more: Heat and temperature

TEMPERATURE

Varanus glauerti basks a lot and needs hot basking spots. The surface temperature of the basking spot, measured with an IR thermometer, must be 45-55 °C. This is achieved with one or more powerful spot lamps or a metal halide lamp, depending on the size of the enclosure. If the animal keeps panting, it is too hot, and the lamp must be weaker or switched on for a shorter time.

The background temperature by day is 26-32 °C. The enclosure must have a large gradient, so that the animal can choose between a hot rock and a cool hide. At night the temperature falls to 18-22 °C. The species' own night temperature is not documented, but this fits the climate.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Humidity must be 50-80 %, preferably 60-80 % for breeding animals. Adults are misted a couple of times a week. Juveniles are misted daily, because they are more active at high humidity. A humidifier in the room works better than an automatic mister. If the air is very dry, a damp hide can help.

Always provide a dish of fresh water, changed daily. The animal drinks from the dish and uses the moisture to help with shedding. Humidity must not be constantly high, and the substrate must be able to dry out between mistings.

Read more: Humidity, misting and ventilation

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal and requires strong UVB light (Ferguson zone 3). Use a UVB tube or a powerful UVB bulb above the basking spot with as much UV output as the manufacturer states for zone 3, and replace it every six to twelve months, even if it still lights up. Position the lamp so that the animal can get close to it when basking.

Keep the light on for about 12 hours a day. For breeding, the day length is slowly reduced from 12 to 8 hours from the end of October, and the enclosure is kept somewhat drier. At the beginning of January the day is increased to 12 hours again, and the enclosure is misted heavily. Mating then follows shortly afterwards.

FEEDING

The species lives mostly on insects. Adults are fed 3-4 times a week with crickets, dubia cockroaches, grasshoppers and hornworms, and occasionally a half-grown mouse or a newborn rat pup. Animals given mice as their main food easily become overweight, so rodents should only be a treat. Hatchlings are fed daily, juveniles of 1-2 years every other day. Keep the feeder animals small and soft, because the species has small jaws and does not use its teeth as much as the large monitors.

The feeder insects are gut-loaded with good food and dusted with calcium. Once a week a multivitamin supplement with D3 is used instead. Females that have laid eggs need extra insects and mice in the first days after laying. Hard-boiled eggs and small pieces of chicken can be used for variety.

Read more: Calcium, vitamins and supplements

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

The species is timid and must be accustomed to handling slowly. In the first weeks after coming home the animal must be left in peace. After that you can hold a hand inside the enclosure at feeding, let the animal come to it and gradually lift it up for short periods. Always sit low, because the animal is fast and can jump. It likes to squeeze in under clothes and furniture, so handle it in a closed room.

Bites are rare, and the species is small, so the damage is slight, but sharp claws and tail lashes can cause scratches. Do not grab the tail, and lift the animal only under the chest. Like all reptiles, monitors can carry salmonella. Wash your hands after handling and care, keep enclosure equipment out of the kitchen, and let small children and pregnant women have contact with the animal only with care.

A pair can be kept together, usually tolerate each other and often bask side by side. This is not always the case, so be prepared to separate them. Two males cannot be expected to work. Watch for bites, stress and loss of appetite in the subordinate animal.

Read more: Quarantine and hygiene

Breeding

SEXUAL MATURITY AND SEXING

Males have larger, distinct clusters of spiny scales on each side of the underside of the tail base. In females they are smaller and not as prominent. In juveniles the sex can be difficult to see, and many are sold as unsexed. Age and weight at sexual maturity are not documented; let the females grow well before they are bred, so that they have calcium reserves to draw on.

MATING

Females can lay unfertilised eggs, and parthenogenesis has been demonstrated in the species. In monitors, offspring from parthenogenesis are always males. With shorter days in autumn followed by longer days and heavy misting, the animals mate at the end of January. The male approaches the female again and again and flicks his tongue over her body, and at first she rejects him. In the end she accepts, and they mate several times a day for about three days.

In the days after mating the female's belly swells, and she eats much more. She begins to dig everywhere to find a nesting site.

EGG-LAYING AND CLUTCHES

A clutch consists of 3-9 eggs. A female can lay up to four clutches in a row in the same season. The female basks for long periods and refuses food a week before laying, especially before large clutches. She often hangs vertically on the wall. From mating to egg laying takes about 21 days, and the pair mate again about a week after laying. The female can be exhausted after several clutches in a row. Therefore separate her from the male after the last clutch, and give her extra insects and calcium.

Place a nest box of about 50 × 30 × 35 cm in the enclosure, with an entrance hole of about 4 cm in the lid and moist sand mixed with topsoil in a ratio of 1:1. A weak 7 W heat mat under one corner keeps the box at about 29 °C. The female digs trial holes and lays the eggs deep down, so they can be difficult to find, and she can become restless when they are removed.

INCUBATION

The eggs are about 3 cm long and weigh 6-7 g. They are taken up quickly and placed half buried in moist perlite in a small plastic box of about 4.5 litres. The perlite is mixed with water in a ratio of slightly less than 1:1 by weight. At 28.5-29.5 °C incubation takes 104-110 days. The box is aired twice a week at the beginning and daily towards the end.

The eggs can collapse in the middle of incubation or two weeks before hatching. In that case place them deeper in the perlite so that they take up moisture. Incubating the eggs of the species is considered difficult, and some eggs are lost in the first weeks. When the eggs begin to hatch, the hatchlings stay in the egg for about a day to absorb the yolk. A strong smell of ammonia at hatching is not in itself a warning sign.

Read more: Incubating eggs

REARING THE YOUNG

The hatchlings weigh 2-4 g and are about 9-10 cm long, with 6-7 cm from snout to vent. They are kept for about two days in the incubation box and are then moved together into a box of about 60 × 40 × 40 cm with at most four hatchlings. Use kitchen roll as the floor for the first two weeks, then cypress mulch. Give them a stack of boards under the basking spot and a hiding place on the cool side.

The heat is 28-32 °C with a basking spot of about 55 °C on the surface, and they have UVB. Mist daily. The hatchlings begin to eat after about a week, first small crickets and chopped pinkie mice, but they are very timid and are not seen eating in the first month. After that they hunt crickets throughout the box. Watch the navel: an abnormally coloured belly can be a sign of navel infection, which can be fatal in the first weeks.

Health and common mistakes

V. glauerti is rare in captivity, and little is known about its diseases. The typical problems are caused by husbandry:

- Too low a temperature or too weak UVB, which gives poor appetite, slow growth and brittle bones. Use a hot basking spot, strong UVB and calcium.
- Overweight, if the animal is given too many mice. Keep insects as the main food.
- Egg-laying problems and exhaustion after many clutches, especially in females that have not had enough calcium and food. Separate the male from the female and limit the number of clutches.
- Navel infection and unabsorbed yolk in newly hatched young.
- Injuries to claws and toes, if the floor is too soft or the branches are not secure.
- Parasites. Australia does not allow commercial export of wild reptiles, so animals in the trade are captive bred; the recorded international trade in live animals was only 88 animals in 1975-2005. This usually means fewer parasites and less stress than in wild-caught animals, but a faecal sample at the vet is still a good idea for new animals.

A healthy animal is alert, has a full tail and clear eyes and eats willingly. See a vet with experience in reptiles if the animal pants for a long time, loses weight, does not eat or has swellings.

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.