herpy

MONITOR LIZARDS

Mertens's Water Monitor

Varanus mertensi

Varanus mertensi is a dark, semi-aquatic monitor from rivers and lagoons in northern Australia, with a compressed tail that works like an oar and nostrils that can be closed under water. The species is threatened in the wild, and although it has been bred in captivity, its care is only sparsely described. It needs a large facility with a deep water section.

Family: Varanidae

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**80-120 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and semi-aquatic**
Habitat	**Savanna, rocky terrain and wetland**
Difficulty	**Expert**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**250 × 120 × 120 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**28-32 °C**
Basking spot	**40-50 °C**
Temperature, night	**22-25 °C**
Humidity	**60-80%**
Water	**Water section** depth 40-60 cm
Water temperature	**26-30 °C**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**10 eggs**
Incubation	**200-300 days** at 28-31 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Endangered (EN)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult needs a facility of at least 250 × 120 × 120 cm (length × width × height), with enough water for it to swim. Two animals need at least 50 % more floor area. Larger is better, because the species swims and moves a lot.

TEMPERATURE

Varanus mertensi comes from a warm, tropical climate and needs a clear temperature gradient. The air must be 28-32 °C by day, and the basking spot must have a surface temperature of 40-50 °C, measured with an IR thermometer.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The humidity in the enclosure should be 60-80 %. With a large water section the humidity holds almost by itself, so the most important thing is good ventilation, so that the air does not become heavy and stagnant.

WATER AND WATER QUALITY

The water section is the heart of the facility, and the animal must be able to swim and dive in it.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Varanus mertensi is diurnal and basks a lot and therefore needs strong light and UVB.

FEEDING

In the wild *Varanus mertensi* lives mostly on freshwater crabs and also on fish, frogs, crayfish, shrimps, other arthropods, eggs and carrion. This is difficult to imitate fully in captivity.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Safety: *Varanus mertensi* is strong and fast, and even an animal of one metre has sharp claws, powerful jaws and a tail that can lash hard.

NATIVE RANGE

Australia.