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MONITOR LIZARDS

Ridgetail Monitor

Varanus acanthurus

Varanus acanthurus is a small, fast and inquisitive monitor from the dry rocky country of Australia, with a tail covered in spiny scales and yellow spots on a dark background. It grows to about 60 cm, is diurnal and lives mostly on insects. In return, it needs a large custom-built enclosure, a deep and damp digging substrate, very hot basking spots, UVB and a lifespan of at least 15 years.

Family: Varanidae Published 15 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**45-70 cm** total length incl. tail
Lifespan	**15-20 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Rock-dwelling, terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Semi-desert, savanna and rocky terrain**
Difficulty	**Intermediate**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**150 × 75 × 120 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-38 °C**
Basking spot	**55-65 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-24 °C**
Humidity	**20-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects and vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**4-18 eggs**
Incubation	**90-150 days** at 28-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult needs an enclosure of at least 150 × 75 × 120 cm (length × width × height). That size usually requires a custom build or an order from a manufacturer, because the standard enclosures in the trade are too small.

TEMPERATURE

Varanus acanthurus needs a large temperature gradient. The basking spot should have a surface temperature of 55-65 °C, measured with an infrared thermometer about two hours after the lamps are switched on.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The relative humidity in the enclosure should be 20-50 %. That is more than in a true desert and corresponds to what the animal meets in its homeland.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal and basks in the middle of the day, so it needs strong light. Fit a daylight tube or an LED lamp of 6,400 K over the enclosure in addition to the heat lamps, and avoid coloured lamps, also at night.

FEEDING

The species is insectivorous. In the wild the diet consists mostly of grasshoppers, beetles and cockroaches, supplemented with spiders, millipedes, woodlice, caterpillars, cicadas and snails.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Varanus acanthurus is a clever and inquisitive monitor that remembers its keepers and past experiences. It is relatively easy to tame compared with other monitors, but taming takes time.

NATIVE RANGE

Australia.