herpy

MONITOR LIZARDS

Savannah Monitor

Varanus exanthematicus

A powerful, ground-dwelling monitor from the savannas of West and Central Africa that digs deep burrows and lives on snails, millipedes and other invertebrates. *Varanus exanthematicus* is the most traded monitor in the world, but also one of those that most often dies in the hands of new keepers. It grows to 60-100 cm, needs a large, hot enclosure with a deep substrate and does best on a varied, moderate diet.

Family: Varanidae Published 15 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**60-100 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**750-3,600 g**
Lifespan	**10-15 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Terrestrial and burrowing**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and savanna**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**200 × 100 × 80 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**26-34 °C**
Basking spot	**50-57 °C**
Temperature, night	**24-29 °C**
Humidity	**40-70%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**15-50 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-3**
Incubation	**150-180 days** at 30-31 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult *Varanus exanthematicus* needs a large, ground-based enclosure of at least 200 × 100 × 80 cm (length × width × height), and more is better. A pair needs about 210 × 150 × 120 cm with 40 cm of substrate.

TEMPERATURE

Varanus exanthematicus comes from warm, open areas and needs a clear temperature gradient. By day the air temperature in the enclosure should be 29-34 °C, with a cooler end of 26-28 °C.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

Varanus exanthematicus comes from dry savannas, but burrows and deep substrate probably hold a higher humidity than the surface. The enclosure should therefore be dry on the surface and moist deep down.

LIGHTING AND UVB

As a diurnal sun-basker, *Varanus exanthematicus* needs strong light and UVB radiation. UVB is necessary for calcium metabolism.

FEEDING

In the wild *Varanus exanthematicus* lives on invertebrates, and in captivity the diet should resemble that.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Varanus exanthematicus is not tame by nature. Newly caught animals puff themselves up, hiss, lash with the tail and bite. The animals are strong and have powerful jaws. Deep bites may need stitches and antibiotics.

NATIVE RANGE

Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda and Congo - Kinshasa.