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 Published 16 November 2026

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

In the Australian state of New South Wales, the rules for private keepers require at least 2.88 m² of floor area for one adult *Varanus mertensi*, for example 240 × 120 cm, based on an average adult length of 110-120 cm, and there must be enough water for the animal to swim.

TEMPERATURE

Varanus mertensi comes from a warm, tropical climate and needs a clear temperature gradient. The figures are borrowed from related monitors and are not documented for the species.

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. A particular water depth is not documented for the species.

LIGHTING AND UVB

Varanus mertensi is diurnal and basks a great deal and therefore needs powerful light and UVB. The right zone is not documented for the species.

FEEDING

In the wild *Varanus mertensi* lives mostly on freshwater crabs and also on fish, frogs, crayfish, prawns, other arthropods, eggs and carrion.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

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

NATIVE RANGE

Australia.