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MONITOR LIZARDS

Nile Monitor

Varanus niloticus

Varanus niloticus is one of Africa's largest lizards: up to 2 m long, fond of water, fast and very defensive. As an adult it requires a whole room.

Family: Varanidae Former name: *Varanus ornatus* Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**120-220 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**6,000-15,000 g**
Lifespan	**10-20 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal, burrowing and semi-aquatic**
Habitat	**Savanna and wetland**
Difficulty	**Expert**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**400 × 200 × 150 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**26-32 °C**
Basking spot	**35-45 °C**
Temperature, night	**22-26 °C**
Humidity	**50-70%**
Water	**Water section** depth 30-50 cm
Water temperature	**24-28 °C**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**24-48 months**
Clutch size	**5-60 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1**
Incubation	**120-300 days** at 27-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE

An adult animal of 150-200 cm needs an enclosure of a completely different size from an ordinary terrarium: a very large cage with trees to climb in and a large basin to swim in.

TEMPERATURE

Varanus niloticus is a sun lover. The background temperature during the day should be 26-32 °C; an adult female of the rainforest form *V. ornatus* has been kept healthy for many years at 25 °C in winter and 32 °C in summer.

HUMIDITY AND WATER

The species is tied to water, and humidity should be around 50-70 %, with a more humid area in the deeper layers of the substrate and a drier one at the basking spot.

LIGHTING AND UVB

The species is diurnal and basks a lot, and UVB light is necessary.

FEEDING

In the wild the species is an opportunistic hunter that eats earthworms, snails, crayfish and crabs, beetles, grasshoppers, spiders, ants, frogs, toads, fish, rodents, lizards, snakes, birds and their eggs as well as crocodile eggs and hatchlings, and which also eats carrion.

BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING

Safety comes first. *Varanus niloticus* is fast, strong and very defensive.

NATIVE RANGE

South Africa, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Angola, Malawi, Gabon, Congo - Kinshasa, Kenya, Uganda, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Chad, Egypt, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau.