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MONITOR LIZARDS

Common Water Monitor

Varanus salvator

Varanus salvator is one of the largest lizards in the world, with males typically 150-240 cm and females 120-180 cm long, a semi-aquatic monitor from swamps, rivers and mangroves in South and South-East Asia. This guide is a reference work on the species' biology and requirements.

Family: Varanidae Former name: *Stellio salvator* Published 15 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**120-240 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**3,000-20,000 g**
Lifespan	**15-25 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal, terrestrial and semi-aquatic**
Habitat	**Rainforest and wetland**
Difficulty	**Expert**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**245 × 185 × 245 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**27-32 °C**
Basking spot	**35-60 °C**
Temperature, night	**21-24 °C**
Humidity	**60-70%**
Water	**Water section** depth 35-50 cm
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**24-60 months**
Clutch size	**6-40 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1-2**
Incubation	**180-270 days** at 25-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	What you have to plan for is an adult animal of 120-240 cm. An ordinary enclosure is not sufficient.
TEMPERATURE	*Varanus salvator* needs heat and must have a clear temperature gradient. The background temperature by day is 27-32 °C.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	The relative humidity should be around 60-70 %. The species comes from humid, tropical wetlands, but stagnant, humid air causes skin infections, so good ventilation is just as important as humidity.
LIGHTING AND UVB	The species is diurnal and basks a great deal. Use a powerful heat lamp over the basking spot and UVB for animals with a high sun requirement (Ferguson zone 3).
FEEDING	*Varanus salvator* is a carnivore and takes almost anything it can overpower: fish, frogs, crustaceans, molluscs, insects, eggs, birds, rodents and carrion.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	An adult *Varanus salvator* is a strong and dangerous animal. It defends itself with its tail, claws and jaws.
NATIVE RANGE	Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, China, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.