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MONITOR LIZARDS

Black-tailed Monitor

Varanus tristis

Varanus tristis is a small, fast, tree-climbing monitor from Australia's dry interior with a black head and tail and a fine reddish-brown net pattern on the back. It grows to 75 cm, is diurnal and needs a tall, warm and sunny enclosure. It is rare in captivity, and only a few reliable experiences with care and breeding exist.

Family: Varanidae Former name: *Varanus punctatus; Varanus timorensis tristis; Odatria punctata* Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**50-75 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**150-330 g**
Lifespan	**8-12 years**
Active	**By day**
Lifestyle	**Arboreal and terrestrial**
Habitat	**Semi-desert and savanna**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**150 × 60 × 120 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**26-32 °C**
Basking spot	**42-50 °C**
Temperature, night	**18-22 °C**
Humidity	**30-50%**
Water	**Water dish**
UVB	**Essential** Ferguson zone 3
Diet	**Insects and vertebrates**
Kept	**Singly or in pairs**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Clutch size	**8-12 eggs**
Incubation	**114-117 days** at 29 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

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

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	A rule of thumb for tree-dwelling monitors is an enclosure that is at least 5 times the animal's snout-vent length long, 2 times wide and 4 times high.
TEMPERATURE	The temperatures for *Varanus tristis* are borrowed from related, dry-living Australian dwarf monitors and are a cautious starting point. Always measure the surface temperature at the basking spot with an IR thermometer.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	The species comes from dry regions and should not have high humidity. About 30-50 % is a cautious starting point.
LIGHTING AND UVB	UVB is important for diurnal monitors that bask a lot.
FEEDING	In the wild the species is a predator of lizards, nestling birds and eggs and probably also takes insects. In captivity insects are the natural staple: crickets, grasshoppers, cockroaches and giant mealworm larvae.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	*Varanus tristis* is a fast, nervous species, and wild-caught animals are often defensive and stressed. The animals bite if they are grabbed, and the claws are long and sharp and can cause deep tears.
NATIVE RANGE	Australia.