



*Caleb Carruth

Ridge Tailed Monitor (*Varanus [Subgenus Odatria] acanthurus*)

Large Monitors in a Small Package

Ackies are a small, terrestrial genus of monitors also known as the spiny tailed monitors, or Ackie's dwarf monitor, or simply "ackie" for short. The ackie, or ridge tailed monitor is a relatively small monitor species with a dorsal and ground color ranging from brown, reddish to reddish brown, or yellowish brown with a series of intricate paler colored yellowish to cream colored dorsal ocelli and spots. The tails of this species feature noticeably spinose (or serrated) scales, hence these monitor's common names. Ridge tailed monitors, or ackies normally inhabit rocky, arid to semi-arid environments where they may seek refuge in burrows or within rock crevices in order to thermoregulation and to avoid predation.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Platynota

Family: Varanidae

Genus: Varanus

Subgenus: Odatria

Species: *Varanus acanthurus**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, these Ackie monitors can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat

Ackies, or ridge tailed monitors are a genus/subgenus of dwarf monitors indigenous to the arid to semi-arid, rocky scrublands, ridges, and other ranges of the western to northern territories of Australia, as well as into extreme western Queensland.

Conservation Status

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Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD). Similar species are IUCN Least Concern (LC), however.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Hatchling to juvenile Ackie monitors typically range from 4 to 8 inches. As adults, these dwarf monitors may range from 15 to 30 inches depending on species, subspecies, and locality. They seldom exceed 30 inches as most adults.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling ridge tailed monitors can initially be started off in anywhere from a 20 gallon tall terrarium or similar sized enclosure, but this enclosure size should be increased accordingly. For a single adult ridge tailed monitor, an enclosure of a minimum of a 40 to 55 gallon long terrarium or enclosure or larger depending on age, size, subspecies, and locality. A deep layer of at least three to four or more inches of substrate should be added to the enclosure, as ridge tailed monitors are strong burrowers. Commercially available orchid bark, cypress mulch, chemical and pesticide free potting soil, or coconut fiber substrates are acceptable for these monitors, but must not be toxic. Most monitors will frequently disrupt and uproot most plants and other enclosure furnishings, but should still be provided sufficient hiding and basking areas in the form of log, rock, or cork hides. A large, sturdy water bowl or dish of appropriate size that ideally allows for easy entry and exit, as well as soaking should also be provided as well. These monitors can also be misted at least two to three times weekly to help maintain hydration and humidity. Sphagnum moss can also be used as a substrate in hides to help increase humidity. Although ridge tailed monitors are primarily terrestrial, they can and will climb if provided the opportunity, and should be provided adequate vertical and diagonal branches, logs, rocks, custom inserted dowels, or other opportunities to enable and provide for additional climbing and basking opportunities.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

For lighting and heating, Ackies require higher temperatures, as their biology and natural history indicate being from more arid Australian environments. Maintain ambient temperatures inside the enclosure from 75 to 85 degrees F that can be allowed to drop about 10 degrees F from this range at night. Ackie monitors will also bask, and require basking temperatures of anywhere from 120 to 140 degrees F. This can be provided through overhead UVA/UVB lighting of appropriate wattage, under tank heating pads (UTHS), ceramic or radiant heat emitters, and/or red bulbs. Temperatures should also be adequately monitored using a reliable thermostat as well. Spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months, particularly water bowls and substrates intended for raising humidity levels (such as cypress mulch, sphagnum moss, etc.). More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; In the wild, ridge tailed monitors are primarily carnivorous to insectivorous, and will feed on a wide variety of food including insects and other invertebrates, crustaceans, mollusks, and other invertebrates, as well as many small vertebrates including small mammals, birds, bird and reptile eggs, amphibians, and other smaller reptiles. They will also eat carrion, or dead and decaying plant and animal matter as well.

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In captivity, variety is essential to a proper and adequate monitor diet. Ridge tailed monitors can be fed a variety of feeder insects of appropriate size including crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms supplemented with vitamin D3 and calcium. Frozen-thawed rodents of appropriate size and raw food items such as turkey, beef, or eggs can also be offered, but sparingly, if at all, as these food items are high in fat and protein for monitors. It is also important to remember not to overfeed any monitors, as they can become very prone to obesity. Feeding schedules can depend on the age, size, and overall health of your monitor, but typically, an appropriate feeding regime for young and hatchling monitors should be two to three times weekly. Most monitors are very alert, intelligent and personable species that can become food aggressive when in the presence of food, and therefore require additional care when handling. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Ackie, or ridge tailed monitors are a hardy and personable dwarf monitor species to maintain in captivity that provide much of the same behaviors and personality as larger monitor species, but in a small to mid-sized package. Ackies can become very tame and personable pets to maintain provided that they are handled and interacted with regularly in a calm and deliberative manner. Any new animal should of course also be allowed to acclimate to its environment and surroundings before handling attempts are made. Overall, each animal is an individual, and these techniques may not be effective for all monitors, but are nonetheless the most commonly utilized.

Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility.

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