



Argus Monitor *Varanus panoptes*

- The Argus monitor is a medium sized to large monitor species indigenous to the coastal grassland and woodland habitats of Indonesia, New Guinea, and northern Australia.
- The Argus monitor is a relatively slender and light bodied monitor with a ground color ranging from brownish, yellowish, to tan, and paler yellowish, brownish, or orangish spots or ocelli along the back. The head is also fairly small and slender, with several rows of dark stripes along their head and neck.
- Argus monitors are often known to display “tripoding” behavior in defense or to survey their surroundings (where they stand bipedially using their hind limbs and tail).
- If provided the proper care, Argus monitors can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

Size

Hatchling Argus monitors typically range from 8-12”. Most adult Argus monitors range from 3 ½ to 5 feet in length, with males being the larger of the two genders.

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling Argus monitors can initially be started off in a 30-40 gallon long terrarium or similar sized enclosure for at least a few months, at which enclosure size should be increased accordingly. For a single adult Argus monitor, an enclosure of a minimum of 8’ x 4’ x 2’ or larger is required for these lizards. When they are adults, a custom built enclosure, or one of the suitable sized plastic or injection molded enclosures with front viewing and opening doors are best for an adult Argus monitor.

A deep layer of substrate should be added to the enclosure, as Argus monitors will burrow and otherwise disrupt the substrate. Commercially available orchard bark, cypress mulch, or coconut husk 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 areas in the form of log or cork hides. A large, sturdy water bowl or tub/tote that ideally allows for soaking should also be provided as well as beneficial misting to maintain adequate levels of hydration and humidity. Sphagnum moss can also be used as a substrate in hides to help increase humidity. Humidity at around 70-80% is acceptable for these monitors. Argus monitors can also climb if provided the opportunity, but do not necessarily require an arboreal setup as they are not arboreal monitors.

For lighting and heating, maintain ambient temperatures inside the enclosure from 75 to 85 degrees F that can be allowed to drop about 10 degrees F from this at night. Argus monitors will also bask, and require a UVB basking temperature of about 95 to 115 degrees F. This can be provided through overhead 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 2-3 months, particularly water bowls and substrates intended for raising humidity levels (cypress mulch, sphagnum moss, etc).

Feeding/Diet

In the wild, Argus monitors are primarily carnivorous, and will feed on a wide variety of food including fish, small birds, eggs, rodents and other small mammals, insects, other invertebrates, and carrion.

In captivity, variety is essential to a proper and adequate monitor diet. These Argus monitors will accept a variety of feeder insects of appropriate size including crickets, roaches, mealworms, and waxworms) supplemented with vitamin D3 and calcium. Frozen/thawed rodents of appropriate size can also be offered, but in moderation, as these food items are high in fat for monitors.

It is also important to remember not to overfeed monitors, as they can become prone to obesity. An appropriate feeding regime for young and hatchling Argus monitors can be daily to 2 to 3 times weekly for adult animals. Calcium and Vitamin D3 are important dietary supplements to include in any monitor diet in addition to providing nutritionally sound whole prey items. Argus monitors are very intelligent species that can become food aggressive when in the presence of food. There are a variety of husbandry methods and techniques different individuals use to reduce or eliminate this behavior that are perhaps beyond the scope of this basic care sheet. If interested in learning more about these techniques, MAHS can be consulted further.

Handling

Generally, Argus monitors are a species of monitor that can often be territorial and more defensive & resistant to being handled in many cases, requiring more skilled and experienced handling by those with previous large monitor experience. Argus monitors can be calmed, but as with many monitors, are animals that require considerable amounts of regular time, patience, and commitment in order to become docile, handleable adult animals. Many different techniques and mindsets are out there with regards to handling and working with these reptiles, which can certainly go into far greater depth than the scope of this basic care sheet. Many believe a more hands off approach is more successful overall, and allowing the animal to gradually and routinely become accustomed to their keeper's presence, to being touched, and handled. Others may choose to practice a more direct, routine handling approach, which may or may not be effective, but often unfortunately causes greater stress and/or injury to the keeper and the animal. Once in the hand, hatchling tegus can be handled with both hands cupped with care not to drop or restrain them tightly. An adult Argus monitor (as well as other species of large lizards) should always receive adequate bodily support from underneath using the hand, and arm for support. Additional restraint can be made by tucking or pinning the animal's tail or hind quarters between the arm and body as well. Each animal is an individual, and these techniques may not be effective for all monitors, but are nonetheless the most commonly utilized. Argus monitors certainly are not for everyone, but with the right techniques and husbandry, can make for very intelligent and personable pets for the more advanced enthusiast.

****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****