



\*Raija Hansen

## Argus Monitor (*Varanus panoptes*)

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### **Advantageous Tri-poders**

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). As with most other monitor species, they are active and versatile animals that can swim, climb, and burrow quite well. The Argus monitor is an alert, active, and extremely personable mid-sized monitor species for the more intermediate to advanced pet owner or enthusiast.

### **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

**Species:** *Varanus panoptes*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, Argus monitors can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

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.

### **Conservation Status**

Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

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### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

### **Size**

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

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must also be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling argus monitors can be started out in a 10 to 20 gallon long enclosure, but will soon require larger accommodations. Enclosure size should be increased accordingly depending on the animal's size. If standard glass terrariums with screen tops are used at any point, ensure that adequate humidity and temperatures are maintained using additional steps to retain it. Adult argus monitors will require a minimum of a six to eight foot by three foot terrarium or enclosure or larger. Very large, custom designed pens or enclosures are perhaps the most suitable housing for most mid to large sized monitors. As with other monitors, argus monitors also powerful diggers, and should also be provided with substrates that enable burrowing and retain humidity well such as chemical and pesticide free potting soil, cypress mulch, orchid bark substrates. Be sure to provide at least 18 to 24 inches of substrate. Monitors in general are very intelligent, alert and perceptive animals, and will require sufficient levels of safety, security, and stimulation and enrichment in order to do well in captivity. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, slabs, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. A large enough water bowl or dish that they can readily enter and exit from that can work with one's enclosure setup and arrangement is also strongly recommended for maintaining adequate longer term hydration, humidity, and quality of life for these monitors. Water should be changed or filtered regularly at a minimum of every other day to maintain cleanliness and sanitary conditions. Argus monitors are primarily a terrestrial species, but will climb readily if given the opportunity.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

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 basking temperatures of about 95 to 115 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, argus 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.

In captivity, variety is essential to a proper and adequate monitor diet. Argus 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**

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 argus monitors 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\*\***

### **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](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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