



Blackthroat/Rock Monitor *Varanus albigularis*

- Blackthroat, or rock monitors are a large monitor species that is highly versatile with its strong claws, limbs, and tails for digging, swimming, and climbing.
- These monitors occur in a wide range of habitats throughout much of sub Saharan Eastern, central, and the Cape southern regions of Africa.
- The rock monitors are a large stocky bodied monitor species with a grayish brown ground color with several rows of yellowish to whitish spots or rosettes grading into light/dark banding on the tail. The head is large and bulbous, and there is often a dark throat and stripe extending from behind each eye down their neck.
- If provided the proper care, Blackthroat monitors can attain longevity of 15-25 years or more.

Size

Ranges from about 7-12 inches as hatchlings, and 4 ½ - 6 ½ feet (54-78") as adults.

Consider the potential size and space requirements of a Blackthroat Monitor prior to obtaining one.

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling blackthroat monitors can be housed in a 20-30 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Enclosure size should be increased accordingly depending on the animal's size. Adult blackthroat monitors will require minimum of a 8' X 3' or larger custom designed terrarium or enclosure. As with most monitors, blackthroat monitors are powerful diggers, and should also be provided with substrates that enable burrowing such as potting soil, cypress mulch, reptile/orchid bark substrates, or dirt. Monitors will dig; be sure to provide at least 18-24" of substrate. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, slabs, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. Provide a large enough bowl or dish of fresh water as well that they can readily enter in order to soak.

For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, or radiant heat emitter. Ideal temperatures for blackthroat monitors range from 75-80 degrees F on the cool side and 95-110 F on the warm, basking side. These monitors will require overhead UVB incandescent and fluorescent lighting to thrive.

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.

Feeding/Diet

In the wild, blackthroat and rock monitors are opportunistic, and will eat rodents and other small mammals, birds, snakes, other smaller reptiles, invertebrates, and carrion.

Feed blackthroat monitors in captivity largely insects such as feeder crickets, mealworms, superworms, roaches, and waxworms of appropriate size and quantity. Gut load these prey items by feeding them commercially available diets for added nutritional value. They will also eat other invertebrates such as shellfish, shrimp, and snails. Blackthroats will less often consume rodents, but can eat appropriately sized frozen/thawed rodents as well (these should be given sparingly, as many species of monitors are prone to obesity as a result of overfeeding or poor diets). Provide calcium and vitamin D3 supplements in blackthroat monitor diets whenever possible. Adults typically can be fed 2-3 times weekly, or 3-4 times weekly for younger animals.

Handling

Blackthroat monitors are a large monitor species that can become quite docile with the right amount of care and interaction. They, as well as other monitors in general, 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 monitors can be handled with both hands cupped with care not to drop or restrain them tightly. An adult 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 blackthroat monitors, but are nonetheless the most commonly utilized. Monitors in general certainly are not for everyone, but with the right techniques and husbandry, can make for very intelligent and personable pets.

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