



\*Ashley Schultz

## Chinese Water Dragon (*Physignathus cocincinus*)

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### Lean and Green Lizard Machines

The Chinese, or green water dragons are medium sized to large, arboreal to semi-arboreal agamid lizards which frequently inhabit habitats near water, where they will often escape potential threats by taking to the water and submerging themselves when threatened. The Chinese, or green water dragon, is a medium sized to large agamid lizard ranging in color from light to dark green or greenish brown with a series of whitish or pale bluish stripes along its lateral sides and dark banding on the tail. Their chin, lower jawline, and ventral surface ranges from white to pale bluish, and a row of low dorsal spines is evident, especially on males. A slightly enlarged, nuchal and vertebral crest ranging from the back of the head, down the back, towards the tail is also present. Water dragons frequently inhabit habitats near water, and bask on overhanging branches or other vegetation where they will often escape potential threats by taking to the water and submerging themselves or by swimming to the opposite side using their powerful limbs, bodies, and tails. Water dragons can make for a personable and attractive species of reptile pet, but require properly sized enclosures and adequate amounts of research beforehand.

### Taxonomy

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum/Sub Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Reptilia

**Order:** Squamata

**Suborder:** Lacertilia

**Infraorder:** Iguania

**Family:** Agamidae

**Subfamily:** Amphibolurinae

**Genus:** *Physignathus*

**Species:** *Physignathus cocincinus*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Chinese water dragons can attain longevity of 10 to 15 years or more.

### Distribution and Habitat

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Chinese water dragons are indigenous to the highland forests and woodlands of southern China and the Indo-Chinese region of eastern and southeastern Asia. Within this range, they also occupy Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, and often occupy these habitats near bodies of water such as rivers, streams, and swamplands.

### **Conservation Status**

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

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Chinese water dragons range from about 5 to 7 inches as hatchlings, and roughly 2 ½ to 3 ½ feet as adults, or about 24 to 42 inches.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling Chinese water dragons can be housed in a 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult Chinese water dragons require a minimum of a 50 gallon long terrarium or enclosure, or one that is otherwise at least three feet by three feet by four feet. Hatchling and adult water dragons can be maintained on a substrate of cage carpet or terrarium liner, or orchid bark substrates. Substrates that retain higher humidity and burrowing opportunities are best. Provide a large dish of clean water, and change and clean it every several days, or sooner if fouled. Soaking them at least once weekly in lukewarm water for 15 to 20 minutes can also help raise their hydration. Provide ample basking and hiding opportunities by providing artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs. Water dragons are arboreal lizards, and especially appreciate additional climbing opportunities as well.

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

For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure. Ideal temperatures for water dragons range from 82 to 88 degrees F on the cool side and around 95 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Maintain at about 80% humidity overall. Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of water dragons in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other health and development maladies. Also be sure to 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. 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**

***Omnivorous***; In the wild, Chinese water dragons are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. They will eat an assortment of insects and other invertebrates, as well as fruit and vegetable matter and occasionally smaller vertebrates. In captivity, feed Chinese water dragons a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. They can also be given a mixed assortment of chopped up vegetables including carrots, peas, collard, mustard, and dandelion greens, and beans. Several commercially available omnivore mix diets are also available. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Water dragons also require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation 1 to 2 times weekly or as otherwise directed for

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optimal health and development. This is in order to prevent Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) and other growth and nutritional deficiencies. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. 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**

As with many reptiles, hatchling and juvenile Chinese water dragons may tend to be initially more nervous and defensive. Handle your water dragon gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most adult water dragons will settle down considerably and become quite tame and personable pets to keep.

\*\*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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