



Nile/Ornate Monitor *Varanus niloticus-ornatus*

- Nile monitors are highly versatile animals that use their strong claws, limbs, and tails for digging, swimming, and climbing.
- They are found in a wide range of habitats throughout much of sub Saharan Africa.
- The Nile monitor is a large, stocky monitor species with powerful claws, limbs, and tail, as well as a well-developed olfactory system (forked tongue). They can range in color from grayish, to blackish to grayish green or yellowish green with numerous rows of lighter colored to yellowish dorsal ocelli and rosettes grading into banding on the tail.
- If provided the proper care, Nile 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 Nile Monitor prior to obtaining one.

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling Nile 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 Nile monitors will require minimum of a 6' X 3' to 8' X 3' terrarium or enclosure. Nile 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 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 Nile monitors range from 75-80 degrees F on the cool side and 95-110 F on the warm, basking side. Nile monitors 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, Nile monitors are opportunistic, and will eat rodents and other small mammals, birds, snakes, other smaller reptiles, invertebrates, and carrion.

Feed Nile monitors in captivity crickets, mealworms, superworms, roaches, and waxworms. Gut load these prey items by feeding them commercially available diets for added nutritional value. Niles will also readily consume eat appropriately sized frozen/thawed rodents as well, but feed them these sparingly. Many species of monitors are prone to obesity as a result of overfeeding or poor diets. Provide calcium and vitamin D3 supplements in Nile monitor diets whenever possible. Adults typically can be fed 2-3 times weekly, or 3-4 times weekly for younger animals.

Handling

Nile monitors are by no means a beginner's pet, and have long held a reputation for being a species requiring more experienced care and handling. When they are agitated, a Nile monitor may tail whip, inflate their throats by hissing to appear larger and more intimidating, and/or attempt to scratch or bite if handled or restrained incorrectly. Nevertheless, it

is possible to end up with an adult Nile that is accustomed to people and being handled, but this takes considerable time, patience, and effort on the keeper's part in order to achieve. Nile, and 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 savannah 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