



Savannah Monitor *Varanus exanthematicus*

- Highly versatile animals that use their strong claws, limbs, and tails for digging, swimming, and climbing.
- Savannah monitors are found throughout most of sub Saharan Africa.
- Medium to large sized monitor with a large, stocky head, limbs, and tail. Can be grayish, tan, to brown with numerous white spots and ocelli on the back and darker bands on the tail.
- If provided the proper care, savannah monitors can attain longevity of 15-20 years or more.

Size

Ranges from 4-6 inches as hatchlings, and 3 ½ - 4 feet (42-48") as adults. **Consider the potential size and space requirements of a Savannah Monitor prior to obtaining one.**

Housing

Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling savannah monitors can be housed in a 15-20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adults require a minimum of a 6' X 3' terrarium or enclosure. Provide savannah monitors with substrates that enable burrowing such as potting soil 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 for opportunities for the animal to soak readily.

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 savannah monitors range from 75-80 degrees F on the cool side and 95-110 F on the warm, basking side. Savannah 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, savannah monitors are opportunistic, and will eat rodents and other small mammals, birds, snakes, other smaller reptiles, invertebrates, and carrion.

Feed Savannah monitors in captivity crickets, mealworms, superworms, roaches, and waxworms. Gut load these prey items by feeding them commercially available diets for added nutritional value. They will also readily consume pinky mice and frozen/thawed rodents as well, but feed them these sparingly. Savannah monitors are prone to obesity as a result of overfeeding or poor diets. Provide calcium and vitamin D3 supplements in savannah monitor diets whenever possible.

Handling

Savannah monitors, 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