

KEEPING ADVICE SHEET

Monitors

Black-tailed Monitor

Varanus tristis tristis



Stripe-tailed Pygmy Monitor (*Varanus caudolineatus*) – Maximum length 32 cm. Category 3.

Ridge-tailed Monitor (*Varanus acanthurus*) – Maximum length 63 cm. Category 4.

Short-tailed Pygmy Monitor (*Varanus brevicauda*) – Maximum length 23 cm. Category 4.

Black-tailed Monitor (*Varanus tristis tristis*) – Maximum length 75 cm. Category 4.

NATURAL HABITS: Stripe-tailed Pygmy Monitor occurs in wattle woodlands (particularly mulga) and rock outcrops in the northern wheatbelt and goldfields. Ridge-tailed and Short-tailed Pygmy Monitors occur in a variety of semiarid and arid habitats in northern WA, with the latter species found south to about Mullewa and Laverton. Black-tailed Monitor occurs in woodlands and rocky areas throughout WA except the extreme south.

Monitor lizards are diurnal.

CAUTION: Monitors can deliver a painful and bloody bite and have sharp claws that can leave deep scratches in skin.

HOUSING: To house an adult pair of stripe-tailed or short-tailed monitors indoors you will require a glass vivarium such as a top-ventilated aquarium or purpose built, glass fronted, wooden box of at least 70 x 40 x 60 cm high. Wire fronted cages are unsuitable for monitors. The larger monitor species will

require cages 120-150 x 60 x 60 cm. Enclosures must be secure and escape proof.

CAPTIVE ENVIRONMENT: Cage furnishings should include suitable hiding places, but similar to large monitor lizards the smaller varieties like to forage on the ground so try to retain an uncluttered floor. The Stripe-tailed Pygmy Monitor is arboreal (tree-living) so provide some vertical and horizontal branches with suitably sized hollows for shelter. One of these located beneath the heat source will become your pet's favourite spot. Any floor covering used should be easy to clean. Try a couple of pieces of indoor/outdoor carpet: one piece can be in the vivarium while the other is drying on the clothesline after being housed off. Sand is considered unsuitable, unless you can easily remove it and replace with fresh material regularly. There is also a tendency for these lizards to swallow sand while feeding. To provide a digging spot, include a shallow (to 10 cm deep), removable tray of sand.

TEMPERATURE & LIGHTING: Monitors enjoy basking so provide an overhead spotlight and 8-10 hours lighting each day with a full spectrum UV fluorescent tube. This needs to be replaced every six months or so to maintain its effectiveness. It is very important to position the spotlight at one end of the vivarium to obtain a temperature gradient with a hot spot of about 35°C at one end and about 22-25°C at the other. This allows your pet lizard to move back and forth to a cooler place if needed.

WATER: Fresh water should be provided at all times in a shallow, non-spillable container.

FOOD: Captive monitors with a ready supply of food and little exercise are prone to getting fat. Try to regulate their food so that you keep them a little lean. Feed on a variety of insects, small mice, canned pet food (no fish) and minced meat. Feed every 2-3 days, occasionally dusting meals with calcium/vitamin supplement. The more live food the better because this encourages your monitor lizard do what it does best - chase its prey with much excitement and get good exercise at the same time.

CAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR/BREEDING: Usually timid and nervous at first, but will settle down in captivity. Avoid excessive handling. Sex determination in monitor lizards is difficult and usually requires an x-ray. Many small monitors have a cluster of spines on either side of the vent, which are larger in males. Females deposit eggs in late spring through to mid-summer, with two clutches in the one season being quite common. Breeding is improved by allowing a cooling off period for a month or so in winter. Skin shedding may be prolonged over several weeks with small pieces coming away periodically.

DISEASES: A clean artificial reptile environment with the appropriate husbandry mentioned above will usually result in your pets remaining healthy. Quarantine newly acquired animals for at least a month before introducing them to those already being kept.

REPTILE MITES: Reptile mites are the scourge of many keepers. They can rapidly multiply and quickly kill a reptile. If an infestation is found, it is imperative that you take immediate action to eradicate it. Although small (a large female may be one-third the size of a pin head) they will be obvious on white paper as miniature black tick-like animals. If you find you have an infestation, it is important to kill it *in situ*. This can be achieved by placing a Sureguard Ministrip™ within the respective cage for at least 8 hours before cleaning. Then follow-up with two 8-hour cycles two days apart. DO NOT expose your pet to the pest strip for any longer or you may kill it.

TICKS: When first obtaining your reptile, check it for ticks. These are often seen behind the limbs and at the base of the tail. They can be removed using tweezers and the bite site dabbed with antiseptic.

FURTHER READING: *Care of Australian Reptiles in Captivity* – John Weigel. Reptile Keepers Association, Gosford, NSW.