

# Asian (Malayan) Water Monitor Care Sheet

## Basic Information and Care Requirements

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### Introduction:

Asian Water Monitors (covering several subspecies) are among the largest of the monitors, reaching up to 7-9 feet long and weighing as much as 135 pounds, but remarkably fast for their size. They chase down their prey. These monitors are semi-aquatic, which makes housing them somewhat more challenging than other monitors. They are also very territorial. We do not recommend any form of monitor for a child's pet or for a keeper's first lizard. If you have the experience to handle one of these interesting animals safely, you may enjoy having one as a pet, but please use caution and common sense.

### Basic Information:

**Scientific Name** – *Varanus salvator*

**Natural Habitat** – Tropical SE Asia, Brackish and fresh water riverbanks and swamps (in yellow on map)

**Size** – average length is ~ 4 feet, Maximum ~ 7 feet with unverified reports of ~9 feet.

**Lifespan** – expect around 20-25 years, possibly longer.



**Captive Diet** – Carnivorous – Babies and young adults through ~ 15–18 months of age will eat a large amount of insects such as crickets, mealworms, young roaches; worms, snails, and small rodents. Adults will eat more rodents, as well as larger insects such as crickets and giant mealworms. Feed babies and juveniles daily, gradually reducing the frequency of feedings as your lizard gets bigger to four/week at about 16”-20” in length, twice/week over 20” in length, and once/week as the animal reaches 28”-30” in length.

Vitamin supplements are a must for lizards in captivity. Lightly dust crickets with a quality **calcium powder** daily for babies, several times per week for juveniles, and once or twice weekly for adults over ~ 1 year of age. Use a quality **vitamin powder** once weekly.

As with most animals, provide constant access to fresh, clean water. Water monitors **WILL REQUIRE** an area to bath and soak in, and rest assured they will make a mess with it! Be sure to keep it clean.

### Housing:

Asian water monitors require a LOT of space. The minimum enclosure size for a small adult should be around 8 feet long by 4 feet wide (the length of the cage should be at least double the length of the lizard). You can purchase specialty enclosures or build your own. Be advised that they will rub their snouts against clear barriers and wire/screen can cause severe injury if not monitored closely. Be certain that it is secure, and locking doors would be a good idea too!

Design the enclosure with climbing structures both angled vertically for climbing as well as horizontally for resting and basking. Branches or shelves should be slightly wider than the lizard. Be sure to provide shelters for the lizards to hide under.

Babies and small lizards can be kept on Cyprus mulch. This will hold moisture to help provide the humidity they need. For adults substrate, we recommend either bare floor or paper. If bare, the floor of the enclosure should provide some traction for walking. Monitors tend to dig

and scatter any loose materials such as sand, wood chips, or gravels. This behavior creates a big mess which can be very hard to keep clean. Loose bedding also presents a possible impaction or choking hazard if your lizard swallows it while eating.

### **Lighting and Heating:**

Design your enclosure large enough to provide a temperature range for your animal. Your monitor needs temperatures around 75-80°F on the cool side at night, and an ambient temperature between 80°F and 90°F during the day. A hot spot should be provided which reaches about 110°F. We recommend spot lights or ceramic heaters, and do not recommend the use of hot rocks. Hot rocks can develop spots which exceed 120°F and can burn your animal. Reptile day bulbs can be used to provide ambient light and heat, but do not provide UV. **Do not use a white light at night!** A 12 – 14 hour cycle is best for the health of your animal. You must have a temperature gradient so that part of the cage is ambient, and part of it is in the hot spot. This will allow your lizard to thermoregulate and pick its own optimum temperature. Be sure that any bulb or ceramic heater is positioned so that the lizard cannot touch it.

Your monitor does not need a source of UV light for dietary reasons, but there is evidence to suggest that having a source of UV can be beneficial for behavioral reasons. Full Spectrum UVA/B can be obtained through fluorescent bulbs such as repti-sun or vitalight, or specialized reptile mercury vapor bulbs.

Use several thermometers to check the temperature in the cool side, warm side, and the hot spot. If your lizard tends to stay in certain areas, then those would be good places to monitor the temperature.

### **Humidity:**

Asian water Monitors come from tropical riverbanks and marshes; they will appreciate a good soaking. Their enclosure should contain a water container large enough to soak in. Be sure you can clean it easily!. As always, they should have constant access to clean drinking water.

### **Choosing a pet lizard and acclimating it to your home:**

When choosing a pet, look for an individual that is active and responsive to handling, and which feels strong and muscular. Animals which show loose folds of skin along the body (dehydration); lumps along the body; signs of external parasites such as ticks or mites (look closely around the mouth, eyes, and cloaca); signs of runny or bloody feces in the tank (internal parasites), any discharge of mucus from the mouth, nose, or eyes may be unhealthy. If possible, find out if the animal is eating well, and what it has been fed.

Give it some time to adjust to its new home. It may take several weeks for your lizard to settle in. During this time, focus on establishing a routine of feeding and cleaning, but do not attempt to handle the animal unless necessary. You may see aggressive behavior such as head bobbing, tail whipping and hissing.

A visit to a veterinarian is recommended for a fecal exam to detect internal parasites. Take the time to locate and visit a vet in your area who specializes in exotics. Taking this time now will save you some time later should your animal become ill or be injured.

### **Sources:**

Balsai, Michael, General Care and Maintenance of Popular Monitors and Tegus. Mission Viejo, CA: Advanced Vivarium Systems, 1997. [www.avsbbooks.com](http://www.avsbbooks.com)

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Sprackland, Robert G., Ph.D., Giant Lizards. Neptune City, NJ: T.F.H. Publishing, 1992.

**For a more detailed information, please read our advanced care sheets at [www.grare.org/library/care.html](http://www.grare.org/library/care.html)**