

Savannah or Bosc's Monitor Care Sheet

Basic Information and Care Requirements

Produced by GRARE – July 27, 2005, www.grare.org



Introduction:

Savannah monitors are one of the more commonly seen monitors in most pet shops. They stay relatively small compared to most monitors (under 3 feet), are brown to grey with dark rimmed light spots on their back, the underside of the throat is light grey or whitish, never black. 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 thoroughly enjoy having one as a pet, but please use caution and common sense.



Approximate range for
Savannah Monitors

Basic Information:

Scientific Name – *Varanus exanthematicus*.

Natural Habitat – Dry, fairly hot regions of grasslands

Size – average length is ~ 2 feet, Maximum ~ 3-4 feet

Lifespan – expect around 12- 15 years, possibly longer.

Captive Diet – Primarily 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. If possible, provide a water container large enough for the lizard to bath in. Be sure to keep it clean, as monitors love to defecate in their water dishes.

***NOTE:** While Savanna Monitors are generally considered carnivorous, there is more evidence coming to light to support a willingness to consume vegetable matter. Occasionally offering your lizard a salad of dark greens and grated vegetables is certainly not going to cause problems, and could help maintain a healthier varied diet.

Housing:

Savannah monitors require a fair amount of space. The minimum enclosure size for an adult should be around 6 feet long by 2 feet wide. You will need to purchase a 100 gallon tank or larger, or possibly build your own enclosure. You can purchase specialty enclosures. 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.

For 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 Savannah Monitor needs temperatures around 75°F on the cool side at night, and an ambient temperature between 75°F and 85°F during the day. A hot spot should be provided which reaches about 95°F. We recommend spot lights or ceramic heaters, and do not recommend the use of hot rocks. Hot rocks can develop spots which exceed 110°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 of ceramic heater is positioned so that the lizard cannot touch it.

Your Savannah 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:

Savannah Monitors come from fairly arid grasslands, but still appreciate a good soaking. You can mist them about twice a week, and give them a good soaking every other week. 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.avsbooks.com

Sprackland, Robert G., Ph.D., Savannah & Grassland Monitors. Mission Viejo, CA: Advanced Vivarium Systems, 2000. www.avsbooks.com

Kaplan, Melissa, Melissa Kaplan's Herp Care Collection, Savannah Monitors (updated Aug. 24, 2004). <http://www.anapsid.org/savannah.html>, 2000.

For a more detailed information, please read our advanced care sheets at www.grare.org/library/care.html