



\*Caleb Carruth

# Rock Monitors (Blackthroat and Whitethroat)

*[Varanus albigularis]*

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## **Black and White Throated Rock Dwellers**

Blackthroat, whitethroat, or rock monitors are a large monitor species that are highly versatile with their strong claws, limbs, and tails for digging, swimming, and climbing. As with most other monitor species, they are active, intelligent, and versatile predators that can swim, climb, and dig or burrow well. The rock monitors are a large stocky bodied monitor species with a grayish brown ground color with several rows of yellowish to whitish spots or rosettes grading into light/dark banding on the tail. The head is large and bulbous, and there is often a dark throat and stripe extending from behind each eye down their neck. These large monitors are also indigenous to a wide range of central, eastern, and southern Africa.

More specifically, these large monitor species can range from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zaire in Central Africa, through Southern Africa, including Namibia, Botswana, the Republic of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, and Angola. These species also range within the African Great Lakes region as well, including Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, in addition to the Horn of Africa from Ethiopia to Somalia. The blackthroat and whitethroat, otherwise known as the “albigularis” among herpetoculture and the pet keeping hobby, are very intelligent, keen, and perceptive animals, and are also among the best suited large pet lizards, or among large monitor species, but are certainly only for the most experienced and dedicated, advanced reptile keepers willing to only provide this large species not only the respect they deserve, but very large, terrestrial enclosures with ample opportunities to dig and burrow and with ample access to water, heat, and UVB lighting.

## **Taxonomy**

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum/Sub Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Reptilia

**Order:** Squamata

**Suborder:** Lacertilia

**Infraorder:** Platynota

**Family:** Varanidae

**Genus:** Varanus

**Species:** *Varanus albigularis*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

## **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, rock monitors can attain longevity of 15 to 25 years or more.

## **Distribution and Habitat**

The black throated and white throated monitors, also known as the African rock monitors, are a species of large, stocky, heavy bodied and versatile monitors indigenous to a wide range of central, eastern, and southern Africa. More specifically, these large monitor species can range from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zaire in Central Africa, through Southern Africa, including Namibia, Botswana, the Republic of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, and Angola. These species also range within the African Great Lakes region as well, including Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, in addition to the Horn of Africa from Ethiopia to Somalia. Within this broad range, these large monitors are quite versatile, and can occupy a variety of habitats including dry, tropical to sub-tropical open woodlands and forests, savannahs, grasslands, steppes, open scrublands, and semi-desert environments.

## **Origin/History**

*Varanus albigularis* (Daudin, 1802). The several subspecies would have other authors first describing them during other years.

Commercial trade in specimens of *V. albigularis* is documented with exports of live wild specimens being particularly documented from Mozambique (CITES trade database). It is unclear as to when exactly these large monitors were first kept and imported for the pet trade, although they have repeatedly been successfully bred in public and private collections for at least several decades since the 1980's or 1990's.

## **Experience Level Required**

Advanced.

## **Size**

Rock monitors begin and range from about 7.0 to 12.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length as hatchlings, but will quickly grow. As adults, these monitors can reach and average a length of about 4 ½ to 6 ½ feet, or 54.0 to 79.2 inches or more in total snout-to-tail length. Snout-to-vent length for males reaches up to 30.3 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL). Females are smaller, reaching up to 24.4 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL). Maximum snout-to-vent length is up to 33.4 inches (SVL). **Consider the potential size and space requirements of any of the rock monitor species prior to obtaining one.**



*Example Ideal Enclosures for Blackthroat/Whitethroat Monitors, or Other Large Monitors.*

## **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial.*** Housing must also be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling rock monitors can be started out in a 10 to 20 gallon long enclosure, but will soon require larger accommodations. Enclosure size should be increased accordingly depending on the animal's size. If standard glass terrariums with screen tops are used at any point, ensure that adequate humidity and temperatures are maintained using additional steps to retain it. Very large, custom designed pens or enclosures are perhaps the most suitable housing for most mid to large sized monitors. As with other monitors, rock monitors also powerful diggers, and should also be provided with substrates that enable burrowing and retain humidity well such as chemical and pesticide free potting soil, cypress mulch, orchid bark substrates. Be sure to provide at least 18 to 24 inches of substrate. Monitors in general are very intelligent, alert and perceptive animals, and will require sufficient levels of safety, security, and stimulation and enrichment in order to do well in captivity. Provide a hide box and artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, slabs, or logs for ample basking and hiding opportunities. A large enough water bowl or dish that they can readily enter and exit from that can work with one's enclosure setup and arrangement is also strongly recommended for maintaining adequate longer term hydration, humidity, and quality of life for these monitors. Water should be changed or filtered regularly at a minimum of every other day to maintain cleanliness and sanitary conditions. Rock monitors are primarily a terrestrial species, but will climb readily if given the opportunity.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

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. In general, the preferred ambient temperatures within the enclosure should be within the mid 70's to 80's, to even 90's. Basking and warm side temperatures can be allowed to reach up to 120 to 150 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Rock monitors also require overhead UVA, UVB incandescent and fluorescent lighting using the appropriate wattage bulbs or other heating elements. 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 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Most monitors are able to tolerate a wide gradient of overall relative humidity levels within their enclosures ranging from lows within the 30 to 50% range, to highs as much as 70 to 75% or more, through means of providing them with the correct and suitable substrates, as well as other humid hides and retreats. These husbandry components are perhaps the best ways of ensuring the proper humidity levels for your monitors in captivity.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Insectivorous to Carnivorous;*** In the wild, rock monitors are primarily carnivorous to insectivorous, and will feed on a wide variety of food including insects and other invertebrates, crustaceans, mollusks, and other invertebrates, as well as many small vertebrates including small mammals, birds, bird and reptile eggs, amphibians, and other smaller reptiles. They will also eat carrion, or dead and decaying plant and animal matter as well.

In captivity, variety is essential to a proper and adequate monitor diet. Rock monitors can be fed a variety of feeder insects of appropriate size including crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms supplemented with vitamin D3 and calcium. Frozen-thawed rodents of appropriate size and raw food items such as turkey, beef, or eggs can also be offered, but sparingly, if at all, as these food items are high in fat and protein for monitors. It is also important to remember not to overfeed any monitors, as they can become very prone to obesity. Feeding schedules can depend on the age, size, and overall health of your monitor, but typically, an appropriate feeding regime for young and hatchling monitors should be two to three times weekly. Most monitors are very alert, intelligent and personable species that can become food aggressive when in the presence of food, and therefore require additional care when handling.

More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

### **Handling**

Rock monitors are a species that may initially be nervous and skittish, particularly newly acclimated specimens or those that have otherwise been only recently acquired. They may bite, claw, tail whip, defecate, or otherwise attempt to flee or escape from what they perceive to be a potential threat or predator. However, with regular handling, interaction, captive born rock monitors can become more tame and personable pets to maintain provided that they are handled and interacted with regularly in a calm and deliberative manner.

Most monitors are very different than many other reptiles in terms of their intelligence and perception, and each individual animal may differ in their temperament or personality. Some will come to acclimate with humans and being handled within a matter of a few months, while others may take many years. Two different trains of thought are out there when it comes to handling or "taming" one's monitors. The first is to handle and interact with them daily until they become used to or acclimated to handling. This method sometimes works, and sometimes does not, and depends on the individual animal and one's circumstances. This can also lead to the opposite desired effect, and make an animal further stressed. The other method, or train of thought is to simply leave them alone, and an added or increased trust among one's monitor may come over time with regular cage and enclosure cleaning, maintenance, or other routine duties. Over time, slow steps may be taken to continue to gain trust with, and eventually become able to handle and interact with them. With this second train of thought, many monitors will become more bold and curious, and interactive naturally on their own than if they are forced out of their hiding places or other areas in order to be handled. Moving slowly and deliberately is always better to help make the animal feel secure, rather than fast, rapid, or jerky movements.

Always keep in mind with regards to the second method, however, that large monitors especially, can still be potentially dangerous, or can be capable of delivering serious bites or scratches, and so some proper precautions when it comes to handling and interacting with them are always recommended. Even animals that can normally be considered "tame" can unexpectedly become threatened, or if one's hands and arms smell like their normal food. Any new animal should of course also be allowed to acclimate to its environment and surroundings before handling attempts are made. Overall, each animal is an individual, and these techniques may not be effective for all monitors, but are nonetheless the most commonly utilized. \*\*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\*\*

### **Contact**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:

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