



\*ArtPal, Larry Nadar.

## Argus Monitor *(Varanus panoptes)*

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### **Advantageous Tri-poders**

The Argus monitor is a relatively slender and light bodied monitor with a ground color ranging from brownish, yellowish, to tan, and paler yellowish, brownish, or orangish spots or ocelli along the back. The head is also fairly small and slender, with several rows of dark stripes along their head and neck. As with some other monitor species, the head and neck are slender, snake-like, and elongated, and the belly is grayish to pale yellowish with darker brown or reddish brown flecks or markings. These medium sized monitors are active and versatile animals which can climb, dig and burrow, and swim well, and are found from a broad range of northern Australia to southern New Guinea. More specifically, this species can occur from northern West Australia to the northern portions of the Northern Territory and northern Queensland, as well as Irian Jaya and other portions of Indonesia, and Papa New Guinea.

Argus monitors are often known to display “tripoding” behavior in defense or to survey their surroundings, where they stand bipedially using their strong and muscular hind limbs and tail. As with most other monitor species, they are active and versatile animals that can swim, climb, and burrow quite well. The Argus monitor is an alert, active, and extremely personable mid-sized monitor species for the more intermediate to advanced pet owner or enthusiast.

### **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 panoptes*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

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

## **Distribution and Habitat**

The Argus monitor is a medium sized to large, terrestrial to semi-arboreal species of monitor indigenous to a broad range of northern Australia to southern New Guinea. More specifically, this species can occur from northern West Australia to the northern portions of the Northern Territory and northern Queensland, as well as Irian Jaya and other portions of Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. Within its broad range, Argus monitors are highly versatile, and can occupy a variety of terrestrial environments and habitats, from tropical to dry rainforests, forests, and open savannahs and woodlands, to semi-arid deserts, grasslands, and scrublands, to coastal areas, mountainous areas, and irrigated or other agricultural and suburban and residential areas.

## **Origin/History**

*Varanus panoptes* (Storr, 1980).

It is not clear as to when Argus monitors were first kept or imported for the pet industry, although they may have been since at least the 1980's. Several subspecies of Argus monitors are known; however, none of the Australian subspecies would be found in the international pet trade due to Australia's strict wildlife importation regulations by about the mid 1970's. All would be listed as CITES Appendix II species.

*Varanus panoptes horni* would be the predominant subspecies available in the pet trade, from southern New Guinea. They are sometimes imported from Indonesia, though a very large captive-born-and-bred population typically supplies the U.S. pet trade market. The Argus monitor, by monitor standards, is fairly widely bred in captivity.

## **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate to Advanced.

## **Size**

Hatchling Argus monitors typically range from 8.0 to 12.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length. Most adult Argus monitors range from 3 ½ to 5 feet in length, or about 42.0 to 60 inches in total snout-to-tail length, with males being the larger of the two sexes. Snout-to-vent length for adults ranges from about 12.2 to 26.3 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL).

## **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial.*** Housing must also be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling argus 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. Adult argus monitors will require a minimum of a six to eight foot by three foot terrarium or enclosure or larger. Very large, custom designed pens or enclosures are perhaps the most suitable housing for most mid to large sized monitors. As with other monitors, argus 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. Argus monitors are primarily a terrestrial species, but will climb readily if given the opportunity.

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

For lighting and heating, maintain ambient temperatures inside the enclosure from 75 to 85 degrees F that can be allowed to drop about 10 degrees F from this at night. Argus monitors will also bask, and require basking temperatures of about 95 to 115 degrees F. This can be provided through overhead UVA/UVB lighting of appropriate wattage, under tank heating pads (UTHS), ceramic or radiant heat emitters, and/or red bulbs. Temperatures should also be adequately monitored using a reliable thermostat as well. 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, particularly water bowls and substrates intended for raising humidity levels (such as cypress mulch, sphagnum moss, etc.). 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, argus 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. Argus 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**

Argus 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 argus 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**

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