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Chinese Water Dragon (*Physignathus cocincinus*)

Lean and Green Lizard Machines

The Chinese, or green water dragons are medium sized to large, arboreal to semi-arboreal agamid lizards which frequently inhabit habitats near water, where they will often escape potential threats by taking to the water and submerging themselves when threatened. The Chinese, or green water dragon, is a medium sized to large agamid lizard ranging in color from light to dark green or greenish brown with a series of whitish or pale bluish stripes along its lateral sides and dark banding on the tail. Their chin, lower jawline, and ventral surface ranges from white to pale bluish, and a row of low dorsal spines is evident, especially on males. A slightly enlarged, nuchal and vertebral crest ranging from the back of the head, down the back, towards the tail is also present. Water dragons frequently inhabit habitats near water, and bask on overhanging branches or other vegetation where they will often escape potential threats by taking to the water and submerging themselves or by swimming to the opposite side using their powerful limbs, bodies, and tails. Water dragons can make for a personable and attractive species of reptile pet, but require properly sized enclosures and adequate amounts of research beforehand.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertilia

Infraorder: Iguania

Family: Agamidae

Subfamily: Amphibolurinae

Genus: *Physignathus*

Species: *Physignathus cocincinus**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, Chinese water dragons can attain longevity of 10 to 15 years or more.

Distribution and Habitat

The Chinese, or green water dragon is a medium sized, semi-arboreal, semi-aquatic agamid lizard indigenous to a fairly wide range of southeastern to eastern Asia. Specifically, this species ranges from southern, southeastern, and portions of eastern China, and into southeastern Asia, including Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Within this range, Chinese water dragons can occur in highland and lowland, tropical to sub-tropical rainforests, other forests, and woodlands, as well as near human habitations, irrigated croplands, and agricultural areas, often along or near the banks of rivers and streams, freshwater lakes, and other bodies of water with ample overhanging or nearby vegetation and other basking sites.

Origin/History

Physignathus cocincinus Cuvier, 1829.

Chinese water dragons have been widely kept and imported for the pet trade since at least the early to mid-1980's, although the exact time of their first appearance in the pet trade is not known. They were most likely imported from southern China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Most that became available in the pet trade would be wild-collected for "farmed", although captive-breeding of this species would take place with at least some greater frequency in later, more recent years.

Experience Level Required

Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Chinese water dragons range from about 5.0 to 7.0 inches as hatchlings and juveniles, and roughly 2 ½ to 3 ½ feet as adults, or about 24.0 to 42.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length. In general, male Chinese water dragons are larger than females, at 6.69 to 9.84 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL), whereas females average 6.29 to 7.87 snout-to-vent length (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure

Enclosure System: Primarily Semi-Arboreal. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling Chinese water dragons can be housed in a 20 gallon terrarium or enclosure. Adult Chinese water dragons require a minimum of a 50 gallon long terrarium or enclosure, or one that is otherwise at least three feet by three feet by four feet. Hatchling and adult water dragons can be maintained on a substrate of chemical free potting soil mixtures, or orchid bark substrates. Substrates that retain higher humidity and burrowing opportunities are best. Provide a large dish of clean water, and change and clean it every several days, or sooner if fouled. Soaking them at least once weekly in lukewarm water for 15 to 20 minutes can also help raise their hydration. Provide ample basking and hiding opportunities by providing artificial foliage, driftwood, rocks, or logs. Water dragons are arboreal lizards, and especially appreciate additional climbing opportunities as well.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

For basking, create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure. Ideal temperatures for water dragons range from 82 to 88 degrees F on the cool side and around 87 to 95 degrees F on the warm, basking side. Maintain at about 80% humidity overall. Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of water dragons in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the

abnormal bone growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other health and development maladies. Also be sure to 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. Chinese water dragons require moderate to high levels of relative humidity, and should be maintained at, or near 75 to 85%.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Omnivorous; In the wild, Chinese water dragons are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. They will eat an assortment of insects and other invertebrates, as well as fruit and vegetable matter and occasionally smaller vertebrates. In captivity, feed Chinese water dragons a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms, but avoid giving them too many insects that are too high in fat. They can also be given a mixed assortment of chopped up vegetables including carrots, peas, collard, mustard, and dandelion greens, and beans. Several commercially available omnivore mix diets are also available. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. Water dragons also require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation 1 to 2 times weekly or as otherwise directed for optimal health and development. This is in order to prevent Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) and other growth and nutritional deficiencies. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. 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

As with many reptiles, hatchling and juvenile Chinese water dragons may tend to be initially more nervous and defensive. Handle your water dragon gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. Most adult water dragons will settle down considerably and become quite tame and personable pets to keep.

****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:

Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com

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