**Reptile Cymru.*

Ridge Tailed Monitors (Ackies) (*Varanus [Subgenus Odatria] acanthurus)*

Large Monitors in a Small Package

The ridge tailed monitor, which is also popularly known as the "ackie", or the Ackie's dwarf monitors indigenous to northern to north central portions of Western Australia, through the Northern Territory, and into extreme western Queensland. The ackie, or ridge tailed monitor is a relatively small monitor species with a dorsal and ground color ranging from brown, reddish to reddish brown, or yellowish brown with a series of intricate paler colored yellowish to cream colored dorsal ocelli and spots. The tails of this species feature noticeably spinose (or serrated) scales, hence these monitor's common names.

As with other monitors, these monitors are active and versatile animals, which can climb, dig and burrow, and swim well. Ridge tailed monitors, or ackies normally inhabit rocky, arid to semi-arid environments where they may seek refuge in burrows or within rock crevices in order to thermoregulation and to avoid predation. Ackies have in recent decades, been a popular smaller monitor choice for pet keepers and enthusiasts, having the same, or at least similar levels of intelligence, and personality as their larger varanid cousins without the size.

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
Subgenus: Odatria
Species: *Varanus acanthurus**
**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Lifespan and Longevity

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

in captivity.

Distribution and Habitat
The spiny tailed, or ridge tailed monitors are a genus and subgenus of relatively small, semi arboreal to terrestrial monitor species indigenous to a broad range of northern Australia. More specifically, these monitors can occur from the northern to north central portions of Western Australia, through the Northern Territory, and into extreme western Queensland. Within this range, these species occupy a variety of arid to semi-arid, rocky deserts or semi-deserts, grasslands, scrublands, to open, dry forests and woodlands, or savannahs with ample vegetation and/or rocky outcroppings for shelter, foraging, and thermoregulation.

Origin/History
Varanus acanthurus Boulenger, 1885; Subgenus Odatria spp. Gray, 1838.

It is not known how or when ridge-tailed monitors, or "ackies" as they became popularly known as, first appeared in the pet trade, although generally, Australia would prohibit its live wildlife exports by the mid 1970's. Ackies, however, became popular small monitor species to be bred in captivity during the 1990's, from what is known about them.

Experience Level Required
Intermediate/Moderate.

Size
Hatchling to juvenile Ackie monitors typically range from 4.0 to 8.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length. As adults, these dwarf monitors may range from 15.0 to 30.0 inches in total snout-to-tail length depending on species, subspecies, and locality. They seldom exceed 30.0 inches as most adults in total snout-to-tail length. Snout-to-vent length ranges from about 5.9 to 10.0 inches snout-to-vent length (SVL).

Housing and Enclosure
Enclosure System: Primarily Terrestrial. Housing must be sealed and escape proof. Hatchling ridge tailed monitors can initially be started off in anywhere from a 20 gallon tall terrarium or similar sized enclosure, but this enclosure size should be increased accordingly. For a single adult ridge tailed monitor, an enclosure of a minimum of a 40 to 55 gallon long terrarium or enclosure or larger depending on age, size, subspecies, and locality. A deep layer of at least three to four or more inches of substrate should be added to the enclosure, as ridge tailed monitors are strong burrowers. Commercially available orchid bark, cypress mulch, chemical and pesticide free potting soil, or coconut fiber substrates are acceptable for these monitors, but must not be toxic. Most monitors will frequently disrupt and uproot most plants and other enclosure furnishings, but should still be provided sufficient hiding and basking areas in the form of log, rock, or cork hides. A large, sturdy water bowl or dish or appropriate size that ideally allows for easy entry and exit, as well as soaking should also be provided as well. These monitors can also be misted at least two to three times weekly to help maintain hydration and humidity. Sphagnum moss can also be used as a substrate in hides to help increase humidity. Although ridge tailed monitors are primarily terrestrial, they can and will climb if provided the opportunity, and should be provided adequate vertical and diagonal branches, logs, rocks, custom inserted dowels, or other opportunities to enable and provide for additional climbing and basking opportunities.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity
For lighting and heating, Ackies require higher temperatures, as their biology and natural history indicate being from more arid Australian environments. Maintain ambient temperatures inside the enclosure from 75 to 85 degrees F that can be allowed to drop about 10 degrees F from this

range at night. Ackie monitors will also bask, and require basking temperatures of anywhere from 120 to 140 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, ridge tailed 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. Ridge tailed 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

Ackie, or ridge tailed monitors 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 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 all monitors especially, are still capable of delivering 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:
Eric.S.Roscoe@gmail.com