

# Monitors (Small)

(Black-tailed, Ridge-tailed, Short-tailed & Stripe-tailed)



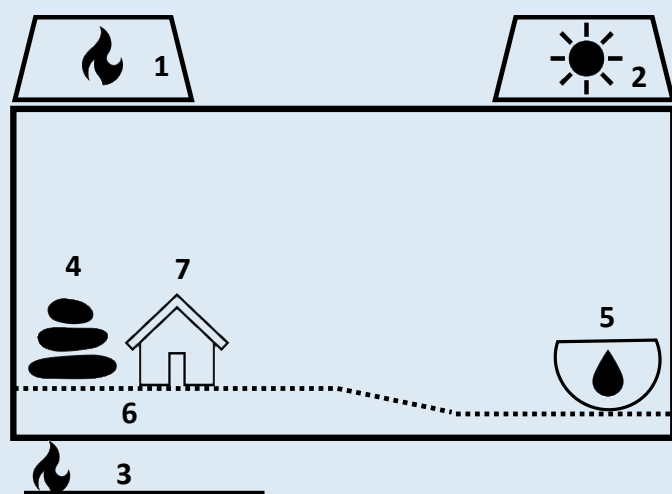
Experienced keepers wanting a challenge, look no further! Monitor lizards offer big rewards for those who can put in the work and build trust with their new pet. These mini dinosaurs can be trained in ways other lizards cannot, and offer laughs, entertainment, opportunities to learn and endless fun to any household they grow up in.

## Housing

**Enclosure Size:** Enclosure size will depend on the number of monitors you intend to house; however, our advice is to house them separately. A single monitor should have enough room to run, climb, burrow (if applicable), and maintain a solid thermal gradient (cool end, warm end). Small arboreal monitors are good climbers but will come to the ground to eat, sleep, or regulate temperature. Terrestrial monitors will still benefit from a raised basking platform. All species of juvenile monitors can be kept in low, wide enclosures until they require more space. A suitable enclosure size for a single juvenile monitor would be 60cmLx30cmDx30cmH. Enclosure size can be grown with your monitor to not overwhelm them with an oversized environment. Monitors are very good at climbing and digging, so ensure that enclosures are escape proof!

Enclosure materials should also be considered as they offer different traits.

- Glass: waterproof but offers no insulation against heat loss.
- MDF: keeps heat well but is not watertight.
- Custom enclosures: can be tailored to your needs but can be expensive.



### Example Enclosure Setup

1. Heat light
2. UV light
3. Heat mat/cord
4. Raised basking
5. Water bowl
6. Digging area
7. Hide/s

**Temperature:** Monitors can tolerate very high heat, and most will be seen basking for large majorities of the day. Although each species will vary slightly, basking spots should sit anywhere between 40-60°C, with a thermal gradient of 28-35°C. Juveniles (especially if a more northern species) should have access to heat overnight via a ceramic bulb, heat mat or heat cords while they are in their main growth years.

**Lighting/Heating:** There are many ways to heat/light enclosures for monitors, and specifics will depend on the enclosure shape you have. We recommend giving juvenile monitors access to heat 24/7 to ensure they're growing and eating consistently. All monitors will need high spectrum UV lighting for bone development. We have found success using the following method:

- Top heat via a reflector globe that is set on a timer. (12-14 hours)
- A separate UV light (we recommend Arcadia Pro T5 UVB 14%) set on a timer (12-14 hours)
- Overnight heat (as a juvenile) using either a heat mat, heat cords or ceramic.

The wattage of your lights/heating will depend on the size of your enclosure and should be controlled with a thermometer/thermostat to ensure the correct temperatures are being maintained.

**Substrate:** There are several great substrates that can be used for monitors; the depth of your substrate will depend on the species you decide to keep (between 100-250mm).

- Paper towel: easy to clean & replace.
- Shredded newspaper: cheap to replace but will need to be changed often.
- Fake grass: easy to clean but can smell after time if not cleaned properly.
- Reptile safe sand: easy to clean but may be ingested.
- Burrowing clay: great for burrowing species but expensive.

**Accessories:** Keeping your monitor's enclosure simple to begin with is recommended while you get used to each other. A simple beginner enclosure will include:

- Water bowl
- Raised basking platform (rock or timber works well)
- Logs to climb and bask on
- Rock/s to bask on
- Fake plants/rocks/logs to hide in or a rock hide.

## Handling

Monitors are not for the faint of heart; their unwillingness to gain trust easily, coupled with their ability to inflict serious bites and/or scratches is why we recommend them to experienced keepers only. Each monitor will have a varying personality, but handling will need to be introduced slowly, in small steps. It could take several years for a young monitor to feel comfortable being handled, and there may be stages that handling is tolerated and stages that it is not. Be guided by your pet, be patient and once trust is formed, the rewards are well with it! Some steps you can take to build trust with your monitor would include:

1. Ensuring your monitor can tong feed without fear before beginning.
2. Tong feed with your hand inside of the enclosure until they're comfortable.
3. Slowly start moving your hand closer to the tongs each feed until they're comfortably eating while on your hand.
4. Place food in your palm and offer your hand for them to climb onto and eat.

5. Start gently moving/handling after feeding times while they're in your hand.
6. Eventually you should be able to handle them without the involvement of food.
7. Utilise keyword training when feeding (i.e., "food") and handling (i.e., "touch" before touching them).

Trust is essential in a keeper-monitor relationship and attempts to grab/handle your pet before they are ready may permanently damage any progress made.

Pets such as dogs and cats should be kept out of the room while you are handling your reptile, and handling is not recommended for young children.

*\*See troubleshooting below for common handling problems\**

## Feeding

**Food:** All monitors are carnivores, eating a variety of food including insects, raw meat, mice, seafood, and eggs. Insects will make up most of their captive diet (around 75%), with other items being fed as treats and/or for enrichment purposes. As a juvenile, we recommend feeding smaller quantities of food more often, which can then be modified as your monitor grows. An example would be:

- 1-3 months: Feeding once a day.
- 3-6 months: Feeding every 2<sup>nd</sup> day.
- 12+ months: Feeding 3 times a week and backed off in the cooler months.

**Water:** A bowl of clean, fresh water can be placed on the "cool end" of your enclosure, and you may want to place a rock at the bottom to reduce the depth for a juvenile. Most monitors will require humidity of 30%; this can be achieved by an average sized water bowl and misting once a week.

**Supplements:** Your monitor will need plenty of calcium to assist with the development of healthy bones. Food can be dusted with a supplement powder every second feed to ensure the correct levels are being maintained.

## Troubleshooting

### **My monitor isn't eating!**

If your monitor is new, they may need a few days or weeks to settle into their environment – this can be quite a stressful time for them (and you). A few contributing factors to new or adult monitor not eating include:

- Temperature – is your enclosure at the correct heat for the species?
- Excess and/or stressful handling sessions
- Torpor/brumation – monitor may go into a state of inactivity for a few hours up to a few weeks at a time.
- Where enclosure is located in the home – near drafts, direct sunlight etc.
- Medical/health problem – if suspected contact your vet.

### **It's winter and my monitor is acting different!**

Your new monitor may go into a state of torpor/brumation during the cooler months. This is an involuntary behaviour that some reptiles have adapted to survive when temperatures are too low for metabolic activity (usually a body temperature below 32°C). As a juvenile, we recommend using heat 24 hours a day for the first few years of its life as this can help reduce the likelihood of your monitor entering this state. Keep an eye on your thermometer temperatures during the cooler months, especially at night. Food can still be offered occasionally as they come out to bask.

### **Bites!**

Your new monitor may try to bite you during handling sessions; know that as a juvenile this is not likely to cause more than a surface wound and is expected to happen at least once or twice during the life of your pet, however adults have sharp teeth designed for ripping meat, and generally do not let go once they have latched on. Although unlikely with proper first aid, bites can lead to possible infections. There are a few possible reasons why a monitor may bite:

- Feeding– this is usually the result of the handler placing their fingers near their pet while eating or using their fingers to feed instead of tongs.
- Defence – monitors will only accept handling from a keeper that has worked hard to gain their trust through a positive relationship.
- Incorrect handling – Juveniles can sit comfortably in the palm of your hand, using a thumb to gently apply pressure to their back. As they grow, they will need to be restrained differently to support their weight and ensure your safety.

### **I never see my monitor out!**

It is not unusual for your monitor to hide, especially if they are just coming home with you and are adapting to their new surroundings. It is recommended that their enclosure has a few different hides they can access (both on and off heat sources). Certain species will also dig, burrow, or squeeze under any rocks/logs they can, so allow them to express this natural behaviour safely with deeper substrates/pre dug burrows etc. You'll soon learn where their favourite hiding spots are, and it is good to check on them every few days if you have not seen them out and about. A few reasons your monitor may be hiding would include:

- During a shed cycle.
- Torpor/brumation – they may only come out to bask at certain times of the day.
- Settling into a new enclosure.
- Stress – too much movement around their enclosure, excess handling etc.

### **I've lost my monitor!**

Always check your enclosure is closed correctly, and never leave your monitor outside of its enclosure unsupervised. Monitors move very fast, so try to locate them as soon as possible. If you do lose your new pet, there are steps you can take:

- If possible, restrict monitor to the room it was lost in (i.e., if lost in the lounge room, close all windows, seal doors by wedging a towel underneath, close vents etc.)
- Most monitors will try and find a small gap they are able to squeeze themselves into to hide (door tracks, under a cabinet etc.)

- Look in places that emit heat like fridges, dishwashers, behind TVs, windows.
- If the animal cannot be located, contact the DBCA (Department of Biodiversity & Attractions) as soon as possible and follow their instructions.

## Book a One-on-One Session

With over 40 years combined experience in the herpetology industry, the Discover Deadly team share a range on expertise. Consultant sessions are available for general advice or more specific issues. Bookings can be made online for \$30 up to 15 minutes.

## Resources

Your first point of contact for advice/enquiries should always be your original breeder however, there are several professional businesses that can be reached out to.

- Unusual Pet Vets (Murdoch) 08 6117 7440
- Unusual Pet Vets (Osbourne Park) 08 6117 7450
- Busselton Vet Hospital 08 9752 1433
- Discover Deadly 08 9755 1771
- Southwest Pets (Bunbury) 08 9721 6217
- DBCA 08 9442 0300

### Further Reading:

- "A Guide to Australian Monitors in Captivity" by Danny Brown
- "Australian Lizards" by Steve Wilson
- "Keeping & Breeding Australian Lizards" by Mike Swan
- "Goannas: The Biology of Varanid Lizards" by Dennis Green

This care sheet© has been produced as a general guide for Western Australian reptile keepers. It should not replace the advice of a veterinarian.

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