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Savannah Monitors (*Varanus exanthematicus*) and White-Throated Monitors (*Varanus albigularis*) Care

Monitor lizards are from the family Varanidae. This family contains 40 species ranging from Africa through southern Asia and Australia. All species are carnivorous and oviparous (egg-laying). These reptiles have a long snake-like tongue. The snout is typically long and narrow. The husbandry aspects of the Savannah and white-throated monitors are virtually identical. Both species are found in desert or dry woodland area. The average length of an adult is 3 feet 3 inches and weighs 10 pounds. They have a broad head and a flat, oval shape to the body. The coloration is typically a dull yellow/gray. Their average life span is 12 years. These reptiles are difficult to sex and usually require anesthesia to evert the hemipenes in the males.

Housing

These animals are predominantly solitary and should be housed separately. A 20-gallon fish tank can be used initially for juveniles. Adult Savannah monitors will require a large tank that should be a minimum of 6' x 3' x 3'. The large tank may be constructed out of lumber. Many different objects may be used to decorate the terrarium. Make sure that these objects are not toxic and that they cannot be ingested.

Some essential requirements of the enclosure include: a basking spot, a good variation in thermal gradient, a hiding place, and a water bowl. A source of UV-B light is essential to the adequate metabolism of calcium in Savannah monitors. The sun is the ideal provider of this type of light. We would recommend that to allow your pet a few hours of direct sunlight each day. If sun is unavailable, then a Reptisun fluorescent light works fairly well. The UV light should be no more than 18 inches from the top of the lizard and is ineffective if it is shining through glass.

A basking spot can be created with an incandescent light or a ceramic heat source, and should reach 90-95 degrees Fahrenheit during the day. The basking light should be turned off at night and the temperature in the cage may fall to room temperature (not less than 54 degrees). By placing the basking spot on one end of the cage, your pet will be able to choose a preferred temperature optimum. Heat rocks are not recommended since they don't provide total body heat adequately.

Substrate for the cage can include artificial turf, newspaper, bark, or cypress mulch. Cedar shavings must be avoided as they can induce carious medical problems in reptiles. The water bowl should be cleaned daily. Many monitors like to soak and will often defecate in their water dishes. Savannah monitors are desert species. Therefore, a low humidity is adequate in their tanks. An increase in humidity may be required to stimulate breeding.

Diet

These species are opportunistic carnivorous/insectivorous lizards. A variety of food items are suggested to fulfill their nutritional requirements. In the wild, they have a period of rapid weight gain for 5 months, followed by 7 months of fasting. As juveniles, they feed predominantly on invertebrates such as snails, earthworms, grasshoppers, cockroaches, beetles, mealworms, and crickets. These insects should be properly gut loaded prior to feeding. The adults eat a variety of vertebrates: amphibians, reptiles, birds, and small mammals. Canned dog food and cat food should be avoided since this will predispose them to obesity. A calcium supplement should be used in juveniles and breeding females. This calcium supplement should be free of phosphorous and Vitamin D3 (crushed Tums or green labeled Reocal are

good calcium sources). *Note: Monitors usually have great appetites that must be regulated to prevent obesity.

Medical Problems

Obesity

Nutritional deficiencies (calcium)

Excessive administration of vitamin D3

Parasites (mites, ticks, and intestinal)

Ingestion of foreign bodies

Pneumonia