



Care For Us

Water Monitor Lizard (*Varanus salvator*)

Animal Welfare

Animal welfare refers to an animal's state or feelings. An animal's welfare state can be positive, neutral or negative.

An animal's welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis. When an animal's needs - nutritional, behavioural, health and environmental - are met, they will have a good standard of welfare.

A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare - throughout their entire life.





Understanding that animals have both sentient and cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry provisions for all captive animals, to ensure positive welfare.

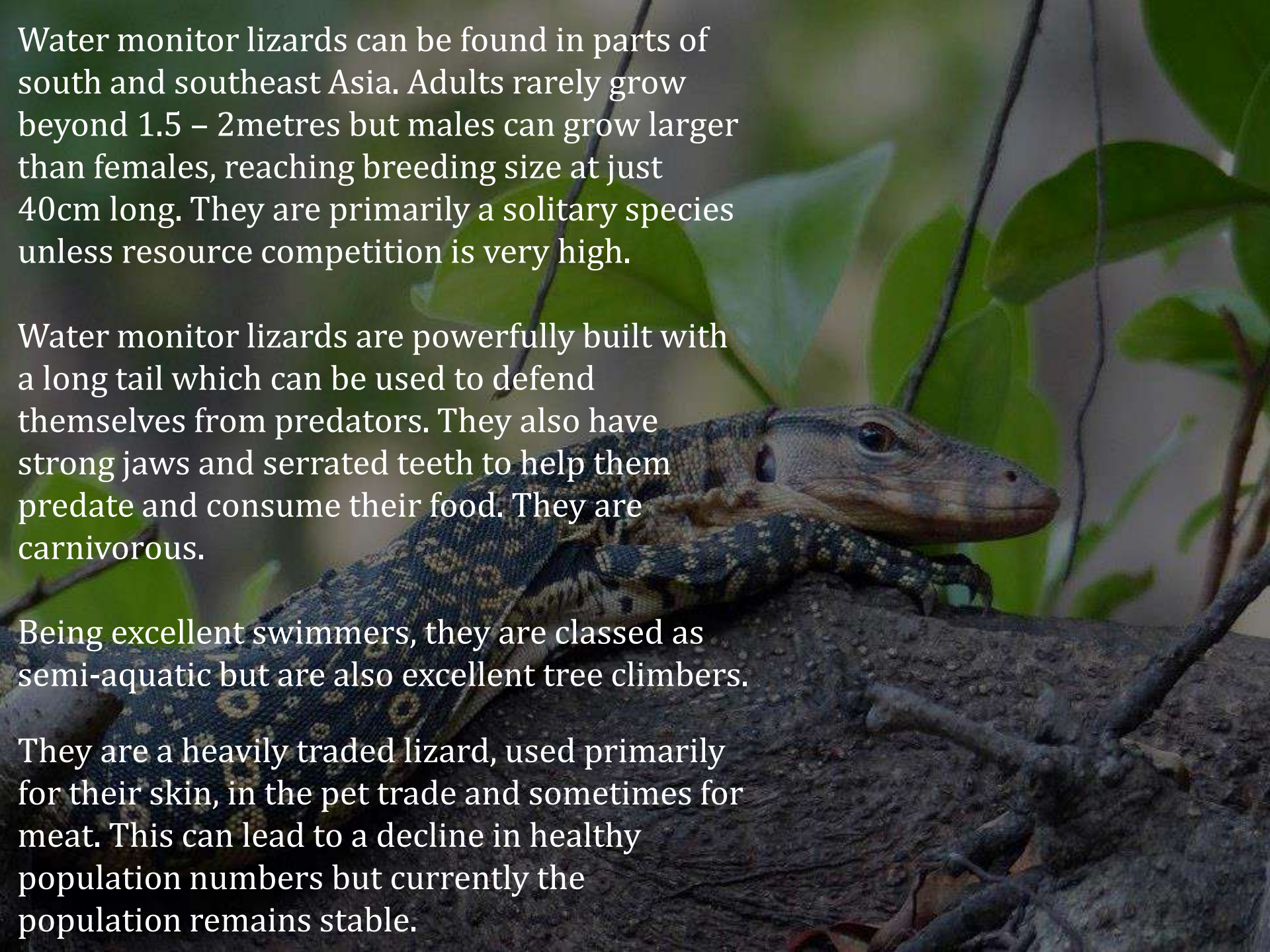
In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.

Water monitor lizards can be found in parts of south and southeast Asia. Adults rarely grow beyond 1.5 – 2 metres but males can grow larger than females, reaching breeding size at just 40cm long. They are primarily a solitary species unless resource competition is very high.

Water monitor lizards are powerfully built with a long tail which can be used to defend themselves from predators. They also have strong jaws and serrated teeth to help them predate and consume their food. They are carnivorous.

Being excellent swimmers, they are classed as semi-aquatic but are also excellent tree climbers.

They are a heavily traded lizard, used primarily for their skin, in the pet trade and sometimes for meat. This can lead to a decline in healthy population numbers but currently the population remains stable.



Water monitors like to explore

Water monitors are well adapted to using water, especially as an escape from predators. They like to explore their environment through climbing around it, digging into it and swimming between places. Their claws make them excellent climbers, and their tails are used as paddles when swimming.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

To make their enclosure more interesting for them, give them rocks and branches to climb on as well as varying substrates to dig into. This will also be useful to wear their claws down naturally. A large area of water will also give the lizard choice to bathe or swim if desired.





Monitor lizards like to hunt and forage

Water monitor lizards like to actively hunt prey and use their powerful muscles to tear into large carcasses. They will also eat carrion and insects so will forage for smaller food items within an enclosure too. They are intelligent and like to explore complex environments for food. They also use their highly developed sense of smell to search for food.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Anchoring large pieces of meat to one place and whole carcass feeding where possible will encourage hunting and muscular usage. Hiding smaller pieces of meat around an enclosure, and the use of puzzle feeders will stimulate foraging behaviours and cognitive use.

Monitors lizards can get diseases

Monitor lizards can get a disease called metabolic bone disease where the internal skeleton, particularly the spine becomes brittle, crooked and painful. This can be due to a lack of calcium within the diet coupled with a lack of vitamin D from sunlight or basking opportunities.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Keeping monitor lizards in an enclosure with various basking spots means that the lizard can choose where they want to bask as well as getting enough exposure to vitamin D and UV rays from specialist lighting. Supplementing the diet with calcium powder will help with mineral imbalances.



Monitors have a good sense of smell.

Monitor lizards have an advanced sense of smell which is explored through their forked tongue. Each fork helps to sense the direction of a smell and the tongue is brought back into the mouth to be assessed by a specialised organ. Their sense of smell helps them to locate food and communicate with others.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Providing scent trails can be a good way to encourage monitor lizards to use their sense of smell to explore their habitat and locate food. Scattering food items around an enclosure will also promote the use of this behaviour. Harsh chemicals can have a negative impact on a monitor lizards' sense of smell and should be avoided.



Monitor Lizards need to shed their skin

Lizards naturally slough off their skin but need the right conditions to have a successful shed. Shedding helps rid lizards of external parasites and ensure scales are healthy. The lizard will need to shed more whilst it is still growing and less as an adult.

Health checks of lizards should always include observations of skin health and shedding progress, including in places such as inside the ear and nostrils. Sheds can sometimes get stuck in these places and may need to be manually removed.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Access to water to bathe in helps soften the old skin and rocks or logs to rub on helps slough it off.

Damp substrates such as soil and mulch can provide some relief for itching whilst sloughing is in progress.

Monitor lizards need a specialised environment

Water monitor lizards are very active and wide ranging. They require appropriate lighting, temperatures between 22°C and 30°C and high humidity within their habitats. Temperatures should be gradients between an ideal maximum and minimum temperature to allow for choice. There should be furniture within the enclosure such as vegetation, substrates and log tunnels for the lizard to hide from view if desired.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

A large and complex environment with a range of temperatures, basking spots, high humidity and enclosure furniture (which is often changed and moved) should encourage choice, exploration and investigation within the enclosure.

Water monitor lizards enjoy

A suitable environment that promotes all their natural behaviours, an appropriate diet presented in a stimulating way and the opportunity to experience choice within their environment.

In captivity we should always try and replicate their natural and normal behaviours, so they are happy and healthy throughout their lives.

