

# Savanna Monitor

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**Common Name:** Monitor – Savanna

**Other Common Names:** Bosc Monitor

**Scientific Name:** *Varanus Exanthematicus*

**Group:** Monitors

**Origin or Range:** Central and Southern African Plains

**Size:** 4-4.5 feet total length,  
30 inches snout-vent

**Average Lifespan:** 15-20 years

**Compatibility:** Moderate  
(as compared to other monitors)

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## Animal Description:

The Savanna Monitor is a medium-sized monitor, generally brown or gray in color with white spots ringed in darker brown (or gray) across the back, with the tail banded in lighter shades of brown or gray. The throat is usually white with thrush-like spots, and the ventral side a light tan. Orange or yellow coloration may be present in the spots or on the ventral side. The head is broad and the tongue blue. They are heavy-bodied, and the tail is quite thick and fairly short. They are the most popular varanid in captivity. Savanna monitors in general are known for their tractability, and can become quite tame. However, they will bite if they feel threatened, and will hang on like a bulldog. Their teeth are sharp and their jaws are quite strong, capable of crushing an adult human's fingers or toes. These monitors will live in communal groups, but adult males may fight. They are generally tolerant of other Savanna monitors as well as other monitor species. Savanna Monitors were not considered very intelligent, until a study was done that showed that they are able to count, up to six.

Savanna Monitors are native to Africa, ranging from south of the Sahara Desert to Zaire. They inhabit a variety of environments, including the savanna grasslands, from which they got their name, dry woodlands, open forests, and dry, rocky areas. They prefer a drier climate, and are not found in the wetter rainforest areas; nor are they found in true deserts. They are used to moderate daytime temperatures, and enjoy basking in hotter temperatures. While these monitors are generally ground-dwellers, even as hatchlings, they will climb, and have been known to climb quite high (40 feet) on termite mounds. I have personally observed Savanna Monitors climbing stone fireplaces and trees.

The Savanna Monitor is not a large monitor. The total length for an adult male can reach 4.5 feet, approximately 40% of which is the tail. The average is close to 3.5 feet. They are heavy-bodied, and can become quite obese in captivity, if given too much food and not enough exercise. The claws are heavy, designed for digging in the concrete-like structures of termite mounds, and must be kept trimmed.

Hatchlings tend to be much brighter colored than adults, with the spots quite distinct and almost pure white. The spots may become less distinct as the animal matures. They prefer to flee, but will readily bite and tail-whip if they feel threatened and cornered.

These animals are still imported in huge numbers from the wild. Due to the low price in the pet trade of wild-caught specimens, captive breeding is generally economically infeasible. A study has shown that the current rate of animals removed from the wild has had little to no impact on the wild population.

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**Specific Care Information:****Relative Care Ease:** Average

Savanna Monitors should be kept at a temperature of around 80-85 degrees Fahrenheit, with a basking area of between 90 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit. They should also be provided with full spectrum fluorescent lighting that provides twelve hours of light a day. At night, the temperature should be around 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Savanna Monitors should be given full-spectrum/UV light, 12-14 hours per day.

The enclosure for an Savanna Monitor should be at least 2 feet high, 4 feet long and 3 feet deep for one lizard. These animals are not particularly active, so a larger enclosure would not be necessary. Low climbing shelves should be provided, as these animals do like to utilize multiple levels. Hiding areas and/or a hide box are desirable, but not essential. Substrate may be papers, Care Fresh, cypress mulch, or dirt. Paper is easiest to change out when soiled, but don't use old newspapers, or your animal will become black from the newsprint. Access to fresh water at all times is essential; some animals like to soak, but most don't, as this is not a common behavior in the wild.

The Savanna Monitor's diet should be varied. They will readily feed on large arthropods, eggs, small lizards, fish, birds, small reptiles, and rodents. Large arthropods are met with enthusiasm, as are eggs and rodents. Raw eggs are messy for the lizard's environment and the lizard and can lead to salmonella problems; hard-boiled eggs are better for this reason. Live rodents should be avoided, as the animal will not eat when it isn't hungry, and rodents can harm the animal. Savanna Monitors can be fed canned monitor diet occasionally, but not often. Canned cat and dog food should be avoided, as they are too fatty and will make the animal obese. Savanna Monitors may swallow anything they come across – including inedibles, so vigilance is necessary when they are not in their cages.

Regular exercise is essential for the Savanna Monitor. Letting them out of the cage for a period each day will allow them to satisfy their curiosity about their surroundings, and get the exercise they need. These animals can become morbidly obese, and can suffer from fatal diseases (such as "fatty liver syndrome") if this is allowed. They can be trained to accept a harness and leash, but will not "walk" like a dog. They lead, you follow.