



Common Name: Chinese Water Dragon, Australian Water Dragon

Latin name: *Physignathus cocincinus*, *P. lesueurii*

Native to: Indo-Australia and Southeast Asia

Size: Adult male water dragons can reach up to three feet in length. Females are slightly smaller.

Life span: Water dragons have lived to more than 18 years in captivity

Animal description:

The Chinese water dragon (*P. cocincinus*) is generally green with vertical slanted stripes that run across the body and a white or yellow belly. These water dragons also possess colorful throats that can range in color from a pale yellow to peach or even pink. One of the most distinctive features are the well developed nuchal crests. The spikes are generally larger in males than in females. Males also possess prominent mid-sagittal crests.

The Australian water dragon (*P. lesueurii*) has the same body shape as its Chinese cousin. It is mostly brown in color. The head is lighter in color with a bar extending past the eye. In females the head is slightly darker and lacks the contrast that males possess. Males also typically have a larger head and crest. The crest runs from the base of the head down to the end of the tail. The body also is marked with bands of light colored bands, giving and overall general banded look to the water dragon. The throat and belly of the males is red while these areas are generally white or cream in females.

Housing requirements:

Enclosure:

Young water dragons can start in a 10-gallon tank but will quickly outgrow this enclosure. Adult water dragons should be kept in an enclosure that is at least four feet by three feet. The larger the enclosure the better since too small of an enclosure can cause the water dragon to rub its snout until a bacterial infection occurs.

Temperature:

Temperatures should be kept at 84° - 88° F during the day with a basking temperature of 90° - 95° F. Nighttime temperatures should be kept at 75° - 80° F.

Heat/Light:

Water dragons require UVA and UVB light. This can be provided with various available fluorescent bulbs commercially available. The ambient temperature can be maintained with basking bulbs, infrared bulbs or ceramic emitters. There are now active UV bulbs now available on the market that also provide UVA/UVB light as well as heat.

Substrate:

A variety of substrates can be used for water dragons. Sterilized potting soil can make for a very nice naturalistic enclosure but can be messy. Newspaper, paper towels, and indoor-outdoor carpeting can also be used and are easier to maintain. Cedar and pine wood shavings should be avoided due to toxicity concerns.

Environment:

As their name suggests, water dragons should have ready access to a pool of water for soaking and swimming. These lizards also require high humidity and the enclosure should be maintained at 60% - 80% relative humidity. This will often require regular misting of the enclosure. Planted non-toxic plants in the enclosure can also help maintain the humidity levels required.

Diet:

Water dragons are omnivorous. They can be fed crickets, mealworms, super worms, earthworms, mice, comets (common feeder goldfish), and day-old chicks. In addition to this water dragons also require some greens and can be offered shredded romaine lettuce as well as other various greens such as mustard, dandelion and collard. Other vegetables such as yellow squash, sweet potato, parsnips, green beans and carrots can also be given. Some fruit such as strawberry, raspberry, blueberry banana, and various melons can also be provided.

Maintenance:

The water in the enclosure should be changed daily unless a filtration system is used. If using filtration, a weekly water change should be performed. The enclosure should be spot cleaned daily and disinfected weekly. If using indoor/outdoor carpeting it is recommended to have at least two sets for ease of cleaning. This will allow you to simply swap the clean carpeting for the soiled so you may clean it. A 5% bleach solution is an excellent disinfectant. Be sure to thoroughly rinse the enclosure and carpeting before placing the water dragon back.

Recommended reading:

de Vosjoli, Phillepe. Water Dragons, Sailfin Lizards and Basilisks.

Lakeside, CA: AVS, 1992.

Mader, Douglas. "Water Dragons: Wet N' Wild." Reptiles USA 2002 Annual: 112-119.