Aurora ANIMAL + HOSPITAL
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Savannah Monitor Care

Please note these care sheets are intended for the average reptile owner to ensure that your pet is receiving basic care needed to have a healthy life and there are other aspects of advanced care that can be considered for healthy pets.

Brief Description

Savannah monitors *(Varanus exanthematicus)* some from sub-Saharan Africa and as their name suggests, they inhabit savannah and scrub brush areas. Savannah monitors can reach an impressive size of 3-5 feet and are very strong with a powerful bite. For these reasons in addition to their cost of care, Savannah Monitors are not beginner reptiles. With appropriate care and patient handling, they can become quite docile and be a rewarding animal to own.



Lifespan

When Savannah monitors are given appropriate care, they can live 10-20 years.

Sexing

Young Savannah monitors show no visual differences as hatchlings or juveniles. As they reach sexual maturity, males tend to be larger, more colorful, and hemipene bulges can sometimes be seen at the base of the tail behind the hind legs. But admittedly it is difficult to differentiate gender in even adult savannah monitors. Males will sometimes evert their hemipenes which can be the easiest way to sex them. Females tend to be smaller, duller in color and larger nares than mature males.

Caging

Savannah monitors grow rapidly so you will need to plan appropriately for housing that provides what your monitor needs at different stages of its life. Hatchlings start around 6 inches and a 40 gallon will provide your hatchling plenty of space to thermoregulate and move about. A large, adult male can reach 4-5ft in length and will require a minimum space of 3 feet by 6 feet by 6 feet. Most Savannah monitor owners end up making custom cages out of wood in order to provide their space requirements and maintain temperatures and humidity. Sturdy branches can be used as cage furniture, but securing any cage furniture is a requirement for these strong and active lizards.

Substrate

Savannah monitors love to dig and providing them with a deep layer of substrate to do so is an important part of their care by allowing them to behave as they would in their native habitats. A mixture of coconut coir, sand, and mulch will help to maintain humidity and will hold its shape as your monitor burrows and digs. Taking steps to ensure that your monitor's substrate doesn't become too wet will reduce the risk of bacterial and fungal growth. Contaminated or dirtied substrate should be replaced. Substrates of newspaper or butcher paper work well for quarantine periods or if your monitor is sick.

Lighting and Temperature

Savannah monitors need a warm place to bask (**95-105 degrees**) on one side of the cage in order digest food and nutrients properly. The other side of the cage should be cooler (**80-85 degrees**) so they don't overheat. A thermometer should be placed at both ends of the cage at the level of the animal to accurately measure temperatures. Lights should be on for 10-12 hours each day and then total darkness at night. Night temperatures can safely drop to 70 degrees so a night time heat source is not necessary in most homes.

UVB lighting is highly recommended. A bulb that specifically provides UVB is necessary as UVB does not penetrate glass or plastic, so having the cage near a window is not adequate. T5 or T8 Zoo Med Reptisun 10.0 or Arcadia 12% are the preferred high quality brands. After about 6 months of use the bulbs will stop emitting adequate levels of UVB, even though they are still shining, so it's important to change the bulb every 6 months.

Water

Savannah monitors will require a large water bowl for soaking. Rubbermaid bins may become the easiest solution for fully grown monitors. The water will need to be changed frequently to keep it clean of substrate and feces.

Humidity
Though Savannah monitors come from dryer habitats, they spend a significant portion of their lives in burrows where humidity is higher. Dehydration can frequently be a problem for captive Savannah monitors and maintaining humidity around 40-50% in their enclosures will help to prevent problems.

Food
Savannah monitors are mostly scavengers in the wild and take in a large variety of prey items. Young savannah monitors should primarily be fed a variety of gutloaded insects including crickets, superworms, Dubia roaches, hornworms, etc. on a daily basis. Adult monitors should be fed only 1-2 times a week as they are very prone to obesity and fatty liver complications. The bulk of an adult monitor's diet should be gutloaded insects. Mazuri Amphibian and Carnivorous Reptile Gel is a high quality commercially available diet that can be used as a regular component of the diet for monitors. Occasional food items like mice, crayfish, chicks or boiled eggs can be offered, but in moderation as these items are very high in fat. Obesity is a common problem for these lizards since they don't get as much exercise in captivity as they do in the wild, and obesity can greatly decrease their longevity.

Staple Foods – 80-90% of diet				
				
Crickets	Dubia Roaches	Superworms	Hornworms	Mazuri Gel

Other Protein Sources – about 10-20% of overall diet				
				
Mice	Eggs	Chicken/Turkey	Low Fat Dog Food	Crawfish

Gutloading
Gutloading is the process of feeding crickets, superworms, and/or dubia roaches a nutritious diet so they can ultimately provide your reptile with the proper nutrients it requires as it would in nature. Supplementing with a calcium and multivitamin powder is important, but not sufficient alone.

Creating a well-rounded gutload at home can seem daunting but can actually be fairly inexpensive and easy to make! Each time you go to the store get one or two staple vegetables on the list above, then rotate them for something else next time. Make sure you wash all produce to eliminate pesticide residues and cut off the peel of fruits and vegetables as they have waxes and pesticides you can't wash off. The time from feeding insects, to your reptile eating those insects, should be 6-24 hours, and gutloading must be done before every feeding to be successful.

Staple Insect Gutloading Ingredients (Highest in calcium and other nutrients)					
					
Collard Greens	Turnip Greens	Mustard Greens	Escarole	Endive	Dandelion

Good Insect Gutloading Ingredients (Use as supplements to staples listed above)					
					
Sweet Potato	Papaya	Kale	Butternut Squash	Berries	Mango
Commercial gutloads: Repashy Superload, Cricket Crack, Super Chow					

Supplementation
A powdered calcium supplement like Repashy Calcium Plus should be used to lightly coat feeder insects. Calcium and vitamin supplementation is not needed for whole prey items like mice or chicks.