



Black Tree Monitors

Varanus beccarii

INTERMEDIATE · 3–4 FT ADULT · 12–20 YR · DIURNAL & ARBOREAL · ARU ISLANDS, INDONESIA

Nothing else in the hobby looks like this. The black tree monitor is a slender, ink-dark lizard from the Aru Islands of Indonesia, built long and light for a life spent entirely above the ground. It is quick, wary and relentlessly alert. The honest headline: this is a specialist's animal, demanding in height and humidity, and it is a lizard you keep to watch rather than to hold.

AT A GLANCE

Difficulty	Intermediate
Temps	80–85 °F day, 72–78 °F night
Humidity	70–90%, adults 80%+
UVB	Recommended, strong output
Diet	Insects, small vertebrates, eggs
Feeding	Daily
Adult size	3–4 ft total length
Lifespan	12–20 years
Native range	Aru Islands, Indonesia



Black tree monitors are an uncommon find at NARBC shows. Every one of them carries a prehensile tail that works like a fifth limb.

Photo: Habitat-OS

01

Temperament & Handling

Black tree monitors sit in the green tree monitor complex and carry that group's nerves. Cornered, they scratch, whip with the tail and bite, and claws built for bark work just as well on skin. The goal is not a tame lizard but a settled one: predictable routine, dense cover, and enough height to climb away from you and watch. Most keepers work through tongs and observation. Handle only when a vet visit or a cage move demands it, and expect to be an intruder the whole time.

02

Housing: Build Up, Not Out

In the table below, the last number is the one that matters. Hatchlings start at 24×18×36; adults need 48×24×72 as a floor and 60×36×84 as a goal. Racks are never appropriate, at any stage. Fill that volume with dense, overlapping branches, cork tubes and foliage so the animal always has a route away from the glass. **House them one to a cage.** Tree monitors kept together bite tails and toes, and the loser quietly stops eating.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	24×18×36	36×18×48	Nervous. Visual barriers are essential, and a tall enclosure from day one.
Juvenile	36×18×48	48×24×60	Needs substantial climbing structure, not a couple of perches.
Subadult	48×24×60	48×24×72	Arboreal: height matters more than floor space.
Adult	48×24×72	60×36×84	Tallest cage you can build. Dense branching, strong UVB, no racks.

Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Vertical at every stage, and no stage of this species belongs in a rack.

03

Heat & Light

Hold the cage at 80–85 °F ambient through the day and let it fall to 72–78 °F at night. That drop is part of the routine, not a failure. Give them a basking branch warmer than ambient, high on a limb the lizard already uses, and guard the lamp, because a climbing monitor will reach a bare bulb. UVB is recommended for this species and adults want strong output, mounted near the top. A lamp down at floor level does nothing for an animal that never comes down.

04

Humidity, Air and Water

Target 70–90% humidity and hold the top of that range for adults, which want 80% or better. High humidity and stagnant air are two different things. A sealed PVC or wood cage with cross ventilation holds moisture without going sour. An all-screen cage bleeds it off as fast as you can put it in. Mist heavily morning and evening. The aim is air that stays damp, not a floor that stays wet. Put the water bowl up high, where an arboreal lizard will actually find it.

05

Substrate and Furnishings

Substrate here is a humidity engine more than a floor. Run several inches of a soil and coco mix with leaf litter on top, and skip loose sand entirely. The real furnishing is overhead: branches of mixed diameters, cork tubes stood on end, and plants dense enough that the lizard can vanish. Put the hides up high, because a tree monitor that has to come down to feel safe never feels safe. Tong work at feeding time counts as enrichment for a bright animal.

06

Feeding

Tree monitors run hot and eat often. Daily is the schedule, not a treat cycle. Insects carry the diet: roaches, crickets, hornworms and silkworms, all gut-loaded and dusted with calcium. Small vertebrates and eggs round it out as occasional items rather than the staple. Feed with long tongs from the first week; it keeps your fingers clear of a feeding response and teaches the lizard where food comes from. A grown animal is 3–4 feet long and still slender. That is correct, not thin.

07

Health Red Flags

A daily feeder that turns down two or three meals is telling you something. Watch the hips and the base of the tail, because those hollow out first. Dehydration reads as tented skin and sunken eyes. Open-mouth breathing, bubbling or a forced, clicking exhale point at respiratory infection. Check the snout weekly, since a stressed monitor rubs its nose raw on screen and glass. Any of these means a reptile vet who knows monitors, this week, not next month.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual - when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.