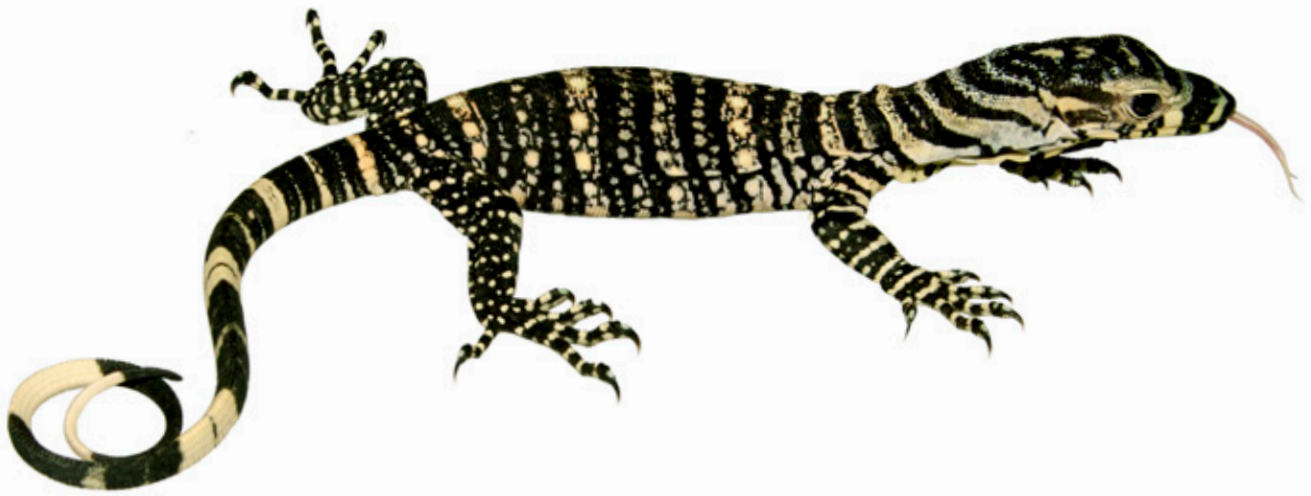




RAISING A LACE MONITOR

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(My apologies if you are a long time monitor keeper and know all of the material in here already. Everyone's experience varies and this is a one-size-fits-all care sheet. If this is not all new to you, please bear with me if the tone seems condescending at any point, for that was certainly not my intent in writing it)



GETTING STARTED

You've just got your lace monitor home after picking it up and presumably the enclosure is all set up and ready to go. The best thing you can do is put it in there and leave it alone. Moving is one of life's biggest stresses even for us humans and we usually move by choice, whereas that little monitor has no idea what's happened to it, where it is or what's about to happen to it if that big predator (which is how it'll view you) gets ahold of it again. What it really wants to do is look around its enclosure until it finds someplace secure to hide and then stay there until it thinks it's safe. If your monitor hides for a day or two after it settles in, don't panic. They are usually quite active when first put into an enclosure and many keepers are lulled into a false sense of confidence that their monitor is the exception to the rule, for it lacks fear of humans and is not as shy as hatchling lace monitors are meant to be. However, once the hatchling has found the hide spots it will usually hunker down and disappear for a day or three. It's normal.

It may not eat while settling in, so don't expect any food to disappear for a few days to a week after its arrival. Put the food in, anyway, but leave it alone and try not to handle it for a while. It'll settle in, feed and grow better if it doesn't feel stressed.

HOUSING

Ideally the enclosure will be completely ready before you get your monitor, but if you have a temporary enclosure for the moment and are planning a new enclosure to raise it in, here are a few pointers.

The best enclosures for monitors are usually home made. Like most people, I started off buying ready-made enclosures at pet supply places. However, even though they were specifically designed for reptiles I invariably ended up pulling them apart and rebuilding them to better suit the monitors. Eventually I decided it would be cheaper and easier to make them from scratch myself. You needn't be a brilliant builder to make them yourself, for I am certainly not one of those, and it needn't be very expensive or fancy as long as it suits the animals' needs. Keep in mind that the instructions given here are for young a lace monitor. Once your monitor is much larger you may wish to house it outdoors if you live in a suitable area.

Size

Enclosures for hatchlings and small monitors can be relatively small, but later enclosures should be as large as you have space for and as tall as you can build them. They like to climb and feel safe when high up. If the monitor is still small and in a small enclosure, situating the enclosure itself high up will help it feel secure, as long as it is looking down on you rather than vice versa. A rule of thumb for the *minimum* enclosure size for a small monitor is double to triple its total length (including tail) in length and double its total length in width.

Materials

Whatever you do, avoid melamine – it rots if it stays damp for too long and chances are it will be always be damp in spots. Sealed plywood is better. A good way to seal plywood and make it impervious to monitor claws is to purchase some West Systems™ two part epoxy from a boat repair or fibreglass supplier. This is best done on the plywood while it is laid out flat, before the enclosure is put together, so you can spread it out evenly. It seems expensive, but a little bit goes a very long way if done properly. Use a spreader rather than a brush. You can even add glass cloth (woven 'glass' fibres as used in fibreglass, but with epoxy instead of polyester resin) for extra strength if you think the monitors may be in there when they are pretty large. Polyester resin can be used instead of epoxy, but you'll want a fair bit of lead time as it off-gasses for a fair while and it wouldn't be very healthy for you or the monitor having that smell indoors. Remember to always wear a proper filter mask when working with resins.

Vents

You'll need a very small number of vents on the enclosure - especially if you have a sliding glass front, as the space between the two pieces of glass is a large vent in itself. How small is a small number? If the enclosure has a sliding glass front, one small vent at the back will be more than enough. Have the vent(s) low down (around $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down) on the back or side wall of the enclosure - preferably at the cool end. If you have vents near or on the top the heat will rise and escape, taking the humidity with it. This is a huge issue. Considering the hot basking temperatures monitors prefer, having all of the humidity escaping out the top will quickly cause problems with dehydration. What I do is look at my enclosures and picture them upside down, trying to hold water. If I can see a gap that I can imagine water pouring out of, the humidity will be doing the same when it is right side up. As you can imagine, screen topped enclosures are definitely something you want to avoid.

Part of the reason I keep mentioning a sliding glass opening is that it is harder to stop a fast little monitor from running out with a hinged door style opening, whereas sliding glass can be opened partially, allowing you more control. It is also easier to pinch a monitor's tail accidentally with a hinged door than with a sliding opening.

Litter Dam

Make sure the litter dam is high. The litter dam is the bit of wall at the front of the enclosure below the sliding glass windows (**Fig. 1**) and determines how deep your substrate can be before it starts flowing out of the front opening. For hatchlings and small juveniles, 15-20 cm is good, deeper is even better. Your litter dam can't be too high, but it certainly can be too low.



Fig. 1 A juvenile enclosure showing the litter dam.

HEATING AND LIGHT

Basking spot

READ THIS, IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT. Monitors love a hot basking spot. The *surface* temperature of the basking spot should be at least 45°C, preferably somewhere between 50-55°C (45°C should be the absolute minimum for a hatchling but they'll definitely need it hotter as it gets larger). The surface temperature should not be confused with the *ambient* temperature. The ambient temperature is the air temperature in the enclosure. The best way to measure surface temperature is to purchase an infrared (IR) thermometer (also known as non-contact temperature gun). These are an excellent investment for all of your reptiles and are available online from a number of different sources, but most online reptile supply companies carry them.



Fig. 2 Left: Infrared (IR) thermometers (non-contact temperature guns).
Right: Measuring the basking temperature in an enclosure for hatchling lace monitors.

To achieve this surface temperature, use lights rather than a hot rock, heat emitter or anything else. Avoid spotlights but use floodlights instead, as they have a less concentrated beam and therefore spread heat more evenly. If your basking set-up isn't allowing a high enough surface temperature, raise the basking platform or lower the light until it does. Don't worry about the monitor touching the light, they usually do that once only as they are quick learners. I am not a fan of commercially available screen protectors for bulbs because they give the monitor something to hold onto (and possibly getting stuck on) should it decide to jump on the light and this may cause it to get burned. Basking lights should be on for most of the day.

You needn't buy expensive bulbs from a reptile supply shop but can purchase them from a hardware retailer. When it comes to the bulbs themselves, 50W Halogen

floodlights (**Fig 3 A**) are excellent as are indoor/outdoor floodlights, but try to avoid those with a clear hexagonal area in the centre of the glass (**Fig 3 B**), especially at wattages above 80W, as they concentrate the beam and can cause burns.



A. 50 watt halogen floodlight



B. Indoor/outdoor floodlight

Fig. 3 Floodlight globes. A. 50 watt halogen globes are ideal for monitors, provided they are close enough to achieve the required basking temperatures. B. The hexagon shape in the centre of some indoor/outdoor globes concentrates the beam so these are best avoided unless they are of low wattage.

Position of lights

Have the basking light fittings on one end of the enclosure so you can create a temperature gradient. Ceramic fittings that can hold flood lamps (usually Edison screw fittings) are ideal. If the enclosure is going to be used for a while, until the monitor is reasonably big, provide fittings for two flood lights, situated a short distance apart, so a large enough basking spot is created for the monitor's whole body (minus the tail). Adults will need a rank of three or four bulbs if housed indoors. A flat basking spot is better than a branch (although it looks like I have used a branch in the photograph of the juvenile enclosure in **Fig 4** there is a mock rock below the branch, see **Fig 1**).

Ideally the light fittings should all be inside the enclosure, fixed to the top, rather than having them sitting on a screen on top of the enclosure (see **Vents**, page 4).

Cool end

As important as it is for your monitor to have a hot basking spot, it's equally important that the monitor can get away from the heat when it chooses. Choice is everything. The cool end of the enclosure can be room temperature, but for a hatchling or very small juvenile, 25°C is ideal. If it's too cool for it, it'll move towards the warm end. Don't panic if the cool end gets to 35°C on a hot sunny day, as long as it doesn't stay there for days or weeks on end.

Night heat

Night heat is only recommended in winter and is not usually necessary in summer (unless it is cool where you are). I use thermostatically controlled ceramic heat emitters and hot rocks for hatchlings that emerge in winter (**Fig 4**). If you choose to use a hot rock, attach a thermostat probe to its surface and set the thermostat to a moderate temperature (25-30°C) so the monitor does not get burned.

UV lighting

The jury is still out on UV lights. The two things in question are whether or they are necessary for monitors (provided they are getting vitamin D3 in their diet and are therefore able to absorb calcium) and whether or not the commercially available bulbs produce enough UV anyway. I use them in some enclosures but also supplement insect meals with D3, calcium and other vitamins. Be careful when using UV flood lights to make sure they aren't close enough to cause eye damage.

Flourescent lights

White light producing flourescent fittings are good for ambient light. If you are going to use some form of UV lighting, get UV flood lamps rather than the flourescent tubes, as the flourescent tubes give off minimal UV and only at a very short distance from the lamp itself. They also produce UV light for a very short period of time and usually have to be replaced every six months, which quickly becomes very expensive.



Fig. 4 Heating and lighting. On the left is a 50W halogen floodlight, in the centre a ceramic heat emitter and in the front (barely visible) a flourescent baton. The cords on the right connect to a heat rock, thermostat probe and thermometer. The thermostat controls both the heat rock and ceramic heat emitter, which are used in winter.

ENCLOSURE FURNISHINGS

These are the things you'll be putting into the enclosure to make your monitor comfortable. A bare enclosure suitable for pythons would be torture for a monitor.

Substrate - (floor covering)

Don't use newspaper. Great for reading and wrapping fish, poor for monitors. Lace monitors do best on some form of loose, preferably natural, substrate. Leaf litter is good - you can go out in the bush and rake up bags of dry gum leaves - as is mulch, such as tea tree mulch. Wood shavings is fine as a substrate as long as it is deep and sprayed frequently to keep the dust down and humidity up. Paper pellets don't work as they don't cope with humidity and swell up, then go mouldy. Don't use grass clippings, hay or anything else that is likely to rot and heat up in the process, either. Cooking your hatchling would make for an expensive, tiny meal and would also make me (and likely you) sad.

The idea behind a deep, loose substrate is that it retains humidity. Baby lace monitors have a large surface area relative to their mass, so they dehydrate quickly. If the monitor feels itself getting too dry it'll dig down to where it is humid. Don't allow the substrate to get too wet, but if it is wet at the bottom (sometime unavoidable as monitors often run in and out of their water dish) that's okay as long as it is still dry on top so the monitor doesn't have to sleep on wet substrate. Deep substrate will also be used for security by some baby lace monitors, as they'll dig right down into it to sleep. As far as cleaning goes, spot clean when and where the monitor defecates. If you keep on top of it you'll rarely have to do a complete change of substrate. For spot cleaning I use a pair of plastic barbecue tongs and pick up the substrate around the faeces all in one go. Throw it on your garden - mulch and fertiliser all in one!

Hide spots

I can't stress enough how important hide spots are for baby monitors. In the wild they're a target for every predator around and as far as your little monitor is concerned, you are one of those predators, too. Until it learns otherwise it will be terrified of you. Security is a huge issue with small monitors. If they don't feel secure, they'll refuse food. Give many, many hide spots. Flat bits of wood, half logs or curved bits of bark laid on the substrate will allow the monitor to dig underneath and create its own secure hide spot. Leave a tiny gap (this is where curved bits are ideal) so it can squeeze in. Monitors tend to like a hide spot requiring a tight squeeze. Hollow fake rocks with a small entrance will also do for some monitors, as will half a clay plant pot (real rocks are okay provided there is no chance the monitor will get crushed once it

starts digging underneath it). Even a half buried PVC pipe might do. The important thing is to give it plenty of choices, so have hide spots scattered all over the place, in the warm end, in the cool end and everywhere in between (**Fig. 5**). If the monitor can get from one end of the enclosure to the other (and to the food dish) without exposing itself, all the better. By the way, hide spots should be inviolate. That is, you shouldn't pull your monitor out of its hide spots unless you have a *very* good reason. Once you do so, it will stop seeing that hide spot as secure and you may notice it scratching to find a way out of the enclosure (in the hopes it'll find someplace more secure outside the enclosure). Monitors become bolder if they know they always have a secure hide spot to run to if necessary and being bolder will speed up the habituation process. Your monitor will probably be a nervous little sod for the first couple of months. Enjoy it while it lasts, for as an adults it'll likely be rushing at you for food.

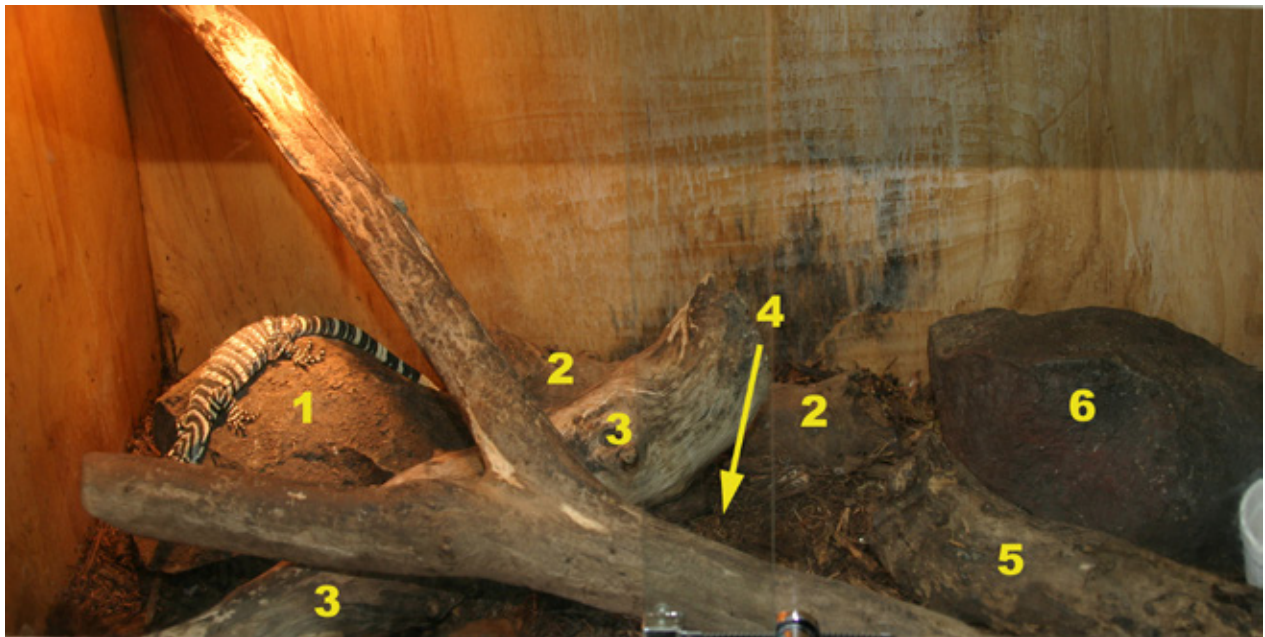


Fig. 5 Hide spots. The 'rocks' numbered 1 and 6 are hollow mock rocks. The small logs numbered 2, 3 and 5 are hollow and have been cut in half lengthwise, then placed with the hollow side downward. Another hollow half-log (number 4) is buried beneath the substrate. There were four juveniles in this enclosure when the photo was taken, but three of them are using the hides. Note the climbing branch, also.

Climbing branches

Lace monitors love to climb, so give yours plenty to climb on, such as branches, fake rockwork or pieces of bark. Make sure that branches are thick enough for the monitor to get a good grip. Replace them when they get too smooth to climb easily.

Water dish

Make sure the monitor has access to clean water, preferably in a dish large enough for it to crawl into should it choose as they sometimes like to soak. It'll probably occasionally even defecate in the water, making enclosure cleaning easier for you.

FOOD AND FEEDING

Monitors are big on food. Just wait, you'll see. One day you'll have fond memories of when yours was nervous and wouldn't eat in front of you

Food

Don't feed your monitor cat food or dog food. That's meant for cats, dogs and pensioners (joking!). Whole foods are always best. When you receive your monitor, it'll have been raised mostly on mice and chicks. You can feed it pinkie or fuzzy mice, chopped adult mice (chop them when they are frozen, otherwise it gets smelly and messy), day old chicks etc. Leave these chopped foods in a dish and let the monitor feed when it wants. It will also take crickets and roaches if you have those around. As it gets older you can feed it whole mice, rats, chicks and rabbits as its main diet, adding other food occasionally as a treat or supplement. It is always best to provide whole prey animals when possible, with bones, gut and fur or feathers, rather than just meat. It's okay to chop up a whole animal and feed it out over several meals.

When the monitor is larger you'll find that you don't need to leave a dish in there for it, but can target feed it with long forceps or tongs. Don't use your fingers unless you want to include fingers in its diet. Lace monitors have extremely sharp, serrated teeth and even an accidental bite from an adult may result in hospitalisation, loss of sensation (from severed nerves), loss of blood (from severed arteries), loss of function (from severed tendons) or even loss of digits (from severed everything). Feeding by tongs or forceps also allows you to target feed monitors that are housed with others and are struggling to get enough food to keep up in growth with their cage mate(s). If this occurs with a nervous animal that will not feed in front of you, you may need to separate it for a while until it catches up to the other(s) or becomes bold enough to be target fed. If you've purchased more than one baby lace monitor from me I try to send out animals of near equal size if possible so that you are off to a good start.

Frequency

Hatchling and small juveniles should be fed at least every second day. It'll be nervous at first, so leave the food in a small dish in the morning and remove the (hopefully empty) dish at the end of the day (**Fig. 6**). If the food doesn't seem to be disappearing and you're not sure if it's eating at all, especially when you first get the monitor, weigh the food dish before you put it in each morning and then again when you remove it later that night. If the food is disappearing but are not sure how much it needs, put enough in so that there's always some left over at the end of the day – you will then know that the monitor is getting all it wants. This is especially true if there is more than one monitor in there, as there is always a danger of one animal eating all of the

food if supply is limited. A young lace monitor will not get fat if there is an adequately hot basking spot, it'll just grow insanely fast. As it gets bigger you can feed every second day, then every third day when it reaches adult size (or less, but watch your fingers if you keep it too hungry).



Fig. 6 Placing the food bowl near a favourite hide spot is a good way to get shy hatchlings to feed. These two photographs were part of a time lapse sequence taken with the camera set on automatic when I was away for the day. Over the course of several hours of time lapse footage it was revealed that the entire clutch was hiding under this mock rock, the top of which is also the main basking area.

Supplements

If you're going to start your monitor on insects, use powdered vitamin and calcium supplements (make sure the latter has D3 added) and dust insects on every feeding.

TAMING AND HANDLING

When your monitor is feeding and growing and it seems that nothing will stop it, then you can start thinking about the process of 'taming' it, or at very least having a manageable animal to deal with. In my opinion, having an animal that is habituated to people makes life less stressful for both captive and keeper but having it 'dog' tame isn't a must. Monitors are very different from most other reptiles when it comes to 'taming'. They are more intelligent than most and must be treated like a wild animal whose trust you are trying to gain, slowly. Patience is the key, for it may take a fair while. Individual monitors differ. Some monitors become accustomed to people in a matter of months, others change gradually over a matter of years. There are a couple of schools of thoughts regarding how to raise a monitor into a nice, calm adult:

1. The handling method

This involves force handling the monitor daily until it (hopefully) gets used to it. Some monitor keepers swear by this technique, others are very much against it. Monitors vary and with some individuals forced handling when young makes them wilder rather than calmer. This is especially true if handling starts with pulling it out of a hide spot, for the monitor then views its hide spot as insecure and will spend much of its time (probably when you aren't looking) trying to get out of the enclosure, so it can find someplace safer. For what it's worth I am not a fan of this method as in my opinion it can lead to adult monitors that bite defensively.

2. The trust method

This involves leaving the monitor alone until it is ready. You continue with your daily routines of changing the water dish, adding and removing food dishes etc. After a while, as it gets bolder, the monitor may stick around to watch you rather than bolt for the hide spot. If you leave it alone at first, it'll learn that you opening the enclosure does not mean it'll get hassled and it'll be more inclined to stay out when you are around. Monitors are very curious animals and will often watch what you are doing, usually hoping it involves food. Start with putting a hand in the enclosure and see if it approaches out of curiosity. Even if it doesn't, but doesn't run to its hide spot, that's progress. If it hisses and puffs up, stay where you are until it stops and starts flicking its tongue, for that's what it will eventually do. Never try to go too far in one session or push the animal beyond its comfort zone. Also, remember to always move slowly, for fast movements may incite a defensive bite. Lace monitors are fast and even at a relatively small size can draw blood. Eventually, try stroking the monitor gently under the throat one day. Move your hand *very* (almost imperceptibly) slowly, fingers together, palm up, back of hand against the substrate, until your fingers are under its chin, then lift slowly and stroke. You'll find monitors are disinclined to bite and use it as a last resort when they feel threatened, or if you smell like the mice you've just

been chopping up. Always wash your hands before you try this. In time, the monitor will may try climbing on to your hand, or you may try lifting it up slowly. Put it back down before it has time to experience anything negative. This is all about positive experiences for the monitor. Eventually it will learn to trust you.

I've long been a practitioner of the second method and it has always worked for me, but in some cases it has taken a very long time. Patience is the key.

At all times remember that lace monitors are potentially dangerous animals as adults and having a habituated individual means you'll be more likely to become complacent and put yourself in situations you'd never dream of putting yourself in with a slightly less tolerant animal. Always wash your hands before handling lace monitors – even the 'tamest' individual may develop 'food brain' (you'll know what I mean when it's an adult, trust me) if you've got food smells on you. It may also react to a hand moving quickly past its face, biting to slow it down before finding out if it is edible or not.



Fig. 7 Gaping. This juvenile lace monitor is giving clear signals that the photographer (me) has crossed into its personal space. Its neck is arched, its throat is expanded and its mouth is wide open in a gape which in life looks a lot like a slow motion yawn. Gaping is not as common a threat display as an arched neck and expanded throat. If your lace monitor behaves this way, keep in mind that it is fear that is driving it to do so. This individual went on to become a very tractable adult through patience rather than force-handling.

SEXING

There's a lot of hearsay when it comes to sexing baby lace monitors. The reality is that there is no reliable way to sex them accurately when they are very young, as there tends to be no consistently visible sexual characteristics until they are larger. The odd male does start developing male characteristics from a very young age, but animals lacking those characteristics are not necessarily females – they may still be males which have not yet started developing. Until they are older, sexing is guesswork.

What about X-rays? Unfortunately, sexing by X-ray usually works for adult monitors only, by which time males have developed the bony elements in their hemipenes which show up on radiographs. However, adult male lace monitors tend to be easy to sex visually, so X-rays are rarely necessary.

What about probing? Males have hemipenes in the base of their tail, like snakes. However, females also have hemiclitori which make it difficult to determine much by probing. What's more, because of the muscular tail probing a monitor will run you the risk of damaging the animal should it suddenly start struggling. If you happen to catch your monitor in the act of everting while defecating, the hemipenes of mature males have elaborate, flowery looking ends whereas hemiclitori are short and nondescript.

What about popping/eversion? As per probing, forcefully trying to get a hatchling lace monitor to pop its hemipenes runs the risk of damaging the animal and may give confusing results, anyway.

What about hemipenal transillumination? In many small species of reptile, or the juveniles of larger species, the male's hemipenes show up as dark red areas when the tail base is illuminated from behind with a bright light source. Unfortunately, most lace monitors have a dark, opaque band covering the area of interest, making this technique unsuitable.

What about laparoscopy? Reptiles can be sexed by inserting a tiny tube (laparoscope) into the abdomen via a tiny, surgical incision and checking whether there are testes or ovaries present. Even if one wanted to go through the risk and/or expense of doing this with a tiny lace monitor the results would be inconclusive, for the testes and ovaries of hatchling monitors are nearly identical in external appearance.

Sexing adult monitors - Although your new lace monitor is probably still too young to sex, I'll describe the physical differences in adults so you'll know what to look for when your monitor starts showing outward signs of leaning one way or the other. It becomes much easier if you have two animals of opposite sexes to compare.

SEXING ADULT MONITORS

Size - Males are larger and bulkier than females. *Most* females don't exceed 140 cm total length (50 cm snout vent length, or SVL) and 2-3 kg (healthy weight, not obese). By comparison, an average adult male will be 150-175 cm or more in total length (60 cm or more SVL) and will usually weigh 5 kg or more, often much more (**Fig. 8, 9**).



Fig. 8 Male (left) and female (right) at the same spot in their enclosure. Note the size and bulky appearance of the male compared to the female's more delicate features. The differences between these two individuals became even more noticeable as they continued to grow.



Fig. 9 The same male as in Fig. 8 (top) with a different female (bottom). This male was around 3-4 times the weight of this female when this photograph was taken.

Tail base - The male's tail base is proportionally wider, tapering off fairly quickly, and the bulges of his paired hemipenes are sometimes visible on the underside of the tail when viewed from the side. The female's tail base is more parallel sided for a short length past the hind legs, sometimes even widening before tapering off (**Fig. 10**).



Fig. 10 Male (left) and female (right) tail bases. The hemipenal bulges are quite visible in this male, but this is not always the case. The female's tail base is more parallel sided.

Head shape - Males tend to have a relatively longer head, particularly from the eye to the tip of the snout. The snout itself is bulkier in males, with the area between the eye and the nostrils more raised than in females, which tend to have a more delicate, pointed snout. Males also have thicker lower jaws and a more massive neck (**Fig. 11**).

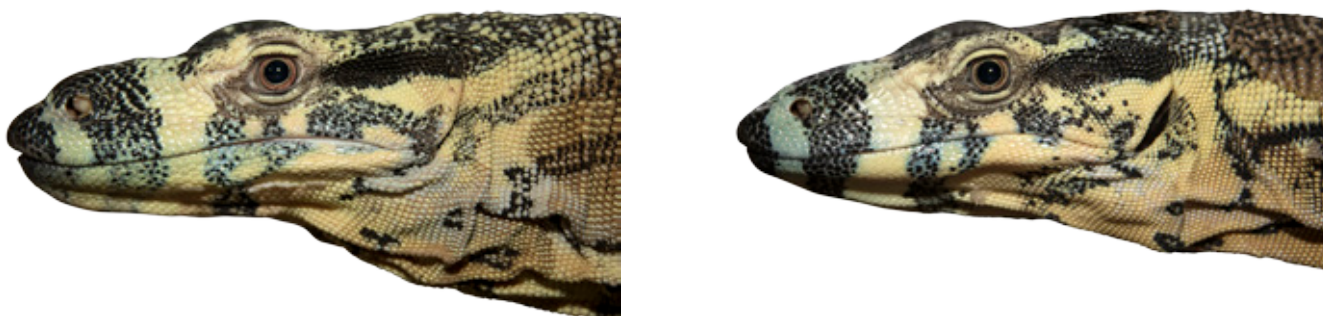


Fig. 11 Head of a male (left) and female (right). The photo of the female's head has been enlarged for more direct comparison of shape. Note the female's small, pointed snout. Juveniles usually start off with a slender, feminine looking head, developing male features much later.

Behaviour - Females have a tendency to be shy, males have a tendency to be bold. All hatchlings and juveniles start off shy, but sometimes these differences start showing up early. Studies of wild lace monitors have shown that males have larger home ranges and spend more time exploring, females restrict their movements to a much smaller area. Most lace monitors seen scavenging picnic areas are males.

TROUBLESHOOTING

I've tried to remember the common problems people have with young monitors in general. This is not all inclusive, but feel free to contact me if your questions aren't answered here.

Why isn't it eating?

There are a few reasons young monitors will refuse food. If the monitor has only arrived recently, it is nervous and may not eat for two or three days. If it continues to refuse food after a week something is bothering it. The most common issue is stress. If you are handling it, particularly if you remove it from its hide to do so, it will feel very unsafe and will know that even its hide spots are not safe. It is best left alone. Similarly, if there aren't enough hide spots and the enclosure is a wide open space, it will feel very unsafe. The second most common issue is lack of a hot enough basking spot. If monitors are unable to get their body temperature into their desired range (usually around 36°C) they will refuse to eat because they will not be able to digest the food. The best way for them to get to that body temperature is with a hot basking spot that is well above their preferred body temperature, so a basking surface temperature of 45°C - 55°C is ideal. Dehydration will also cause a monitor to refuse food. If there is insufficient humidity in the enclosure, young monitors sometimes hunker down and go into shut down mode, in preparation for a long dry spell. Screen tops on tanks are the usual cause of this (see the section on enclosure construction). I spray down my hatchling raise-up enclosure on a regular basis to keep it humid when they are small.

What's that white crust around its nostrils?

You may occasionally notice slight white encrustations around your monitor's nostrils, looking a lot like salt. That's what it is. Monitors have salt glands in their nasal cavities and get rid of excess salt via their nostrils. You may notice the monitor putting its head over one shoulder and letting out what sounds like a sneeze every now and then - that's how it clears the salt while still in liquid form. As long as these 'sneezes' are infrequent, it's nothing to worry about. If the monitor seems to have a lot of salt to get rid of, chances are that it is being kept too dry.

Is it normal for a monitor to defecate and regurgitate on people?

Yes, if it feels stressed. Young monitors will often get rid of the last meal you gave it, perhaps along with the one before that (out of the other end) if you pick them up. This is a clear sign of fright. When a monitor defecates on you as you pick it up it is trying to tell you something: That it is not ready to be handled. You should listen to it. It will stop doing this when older and well habituated to people.

Is it normal for a monitor to hide all of the time?

Yes, when it is small. It'll emerge to bask and feed when you aren't looking and may stay still if you walk into the room. It is just waiting for you to turn away so it doesn't give away its hiding spot when it bolts.

Is it normal for monitor faeces to smell so horribly?

Yes, get used to it. :)

IF IN DOUBT

Consider this a 'Coles Notes/Reader's Digest' version of the previous 17 pages:

Give your monitor as many choices as possible, for it has inbuilt instincts honed over millions of years that will make sure it makes the right choices most of the time. Choices in temperature, humidity, hide spots and basking spots. In other words, supply it with a range or gradient of temperatures from hot to warm (or even cool), more hide spots than it could possibly need or use and the ability to get as wet as it wants or as dry as it wants. Problems arise when we think we can make those choices for them and force them to live in conditions that are unsuitable to them.

Enjoy your monitor!