



Ackie Monitor

Varanus acanthurus

INTERMEDIATE · 18–28 IN ADULT · 15–20 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · AUSTRALIA

The ackie is the gateway monitor: all the intelligence and swagger of the big varanids in a two-foot, manageable package. These Australian dwarf monitors are active, inquisitive diggers that learn routines, work puzzles for food, and live 15–20 years. The price of admission is infrastructure. Serious heat, deep substrate, and more floor space than their size suggests.

AT A GLANCE	
Ambient (day)	82–90 °F
Basking surface	130–150 °F
Night	75–80 °F
Humidity	40–60% + humid burrows
UVB	Recommended
Diet	Insects, eggs, some rodents
Feeding cadence	Daily to every other day
Adult size	18–28 in
Lifespan	15–20 years



Ackie monitor: sold as Ackie, Ridge-Tailed or Spiny-Tailed Monitor. Same animal, same care.

Photo: Connor Margetts / iNaturalist · CC0

01

Temperament & Handling

Ackies tame through the food bowl, not the hand: tong-feed on a routine, let the monitor climb onto you on its own schedule, and you'll have a bold lizard that runs to the glass when you enter the room. Grabbing gets you a whipping spiny tail and a trust deficit. This is a watch-and-interact animal that happens to tolerate handling, not the reverse.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Think of the enclosure as a habitat machine: long footprint, sealed to hold **12+ inches of diggable substrate**, with a stacked-stone or cork 'retes stack' under the basking lamp that lets the monitor pick its exact temperature by depth and height. Ackies without digging depth and hiding layers become flighty shelf ornaments.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	24×18×18	36×18×18	Six-plus inches of substrate from the start.
Juvenile	36×18×18	48×24×24	Enrich constantly: cork, branches, hunt-able prey.
Subadult	48×24×24	72×30×24	Adult size arrives by about two years.
Adult	60×30×24	72×36×30	Deep substrate (12 in+) and an intense basking stack.

Enclosure sizes in inches, L×W×H. Habitat-OS life-stage guidance.

03

Heat: bigger numbers than you think

The basking surface, not the air, should hit 130–150 °F, delivered by a halogen cluster over stone and verified with a temp gun. Ambient stays 82–90 °F with a cool end in the high 70s and nights near 75–80 °F. Every lamp on a thermostat or dimmer; a monitor that stops basking is usually telling you the numbers drifted.

04

Humidity & the burrow layer

Surface air stays moderate at 40–60%, but the magic is underground: keep the lower half of that deep substrate lightly moist so burrows hold shape and stay humid. That moisture gradient is how a desert monitor hydrates and sheds cleanly. Offer a water dish as backup and expect it to double as a toilet.

05

Substrate & Enrichment

A sandy-soil mix that compacts (roughly 60/40 soil to washed sand) beats anything bagged. Bury flat stones and cork so tunnels have ceilings. Rotate enrichment: new climbing wood, scatter-fed insects, whole eggs to crack. An ackie's brain needs feeding as surely as its stomach.

06

Feeding

Insects are the staple, fed daily to fast-growing youngsters and every other day to adults. Dust dubia, crickets and hornworms with plain calcium, no D3 and no phosphorus, at most feedings; the UVB supplies the D3. Add a multivitamin weekly while growing, twice monthly once adult. Whole prey like the occasional mouse or a raw egg adds variety, but captive ackies get fat easily: lean insect protein should dominate, and body condition, a visible waist from above, is the gauge that matters.

07

Health Red Flags

Obesity is the silent one; a tail carrying fat rolls and no waist means cut the rodents. Chronic hiding or glass-pacing signals a husbandry gap: usually not enough substrate depth, cover or basking heat. Flaky, incomplete sheds point to dry burrows. Burns from unregulated lamps and dehydration (sunken preorbital skin) round out the list, all preventable with a temp gun and a misting can.

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.