



Green Tree Monitors

Varanus prasinus

ADVANCED · 2.5–3.5 FT ADULT · 10–15 YR LIFESPAN · DIURNAL · ARBOREAL · NEW GUINEA

Few lizards look less real than a green tree monitor: whip-thin, emerald, with a prehensile tail it uses like a fifth limb. They come from New Guinea and spend their lives above the ground, hunting insects through the canopy at a pace that never settles. The honest headline is simple. This is an advanced animal, fast and nervous and sharp at both ends, and it will not become tame. You keep one to watch it, not to hold it.

AT A GLANCE	
Ambient temp	80–85 °F
Basking spot	95–110 °F
Night temp	72–78 °F
Humidity	70–90%
UVB	Required
Diet	Insects, small mice, eggs
Feeding cadence	Every 1–2 days
Adult size	2.5–3.5 ft
Lifespan	10–15 years



A prehensile tail and emerald scales: green tree monitors are built for the canopy. Look for captive-bred animals at NARBC breeder tables.

Photo: coenobita / iNaturalist · CC BY

01

Sharp, Fast, and Not a Pet You Hold

Tree monitors are alert, quick and permanently switched on. They notice you across the room, and they do not habituate the way a bearded dragon does. Handling is for vet trips and enclosure moves; expect claws, a whipping tail and a bite that means it. Buy captive-bred, always. Wild-caught imports arrive stressed and parasitized, and they acclimate badly. **Cover is not decoration: a monitor with nowhere to hide is a monitor that stops eating.**

02

Housing: Height Before Floor Space

Everything about this animal points up. Give it a vertical, front-opening enclosure with a sealed body: screen cages bleed humidity away faster than you can replace it. Racks are never appropriate, at any stage or any size. Pairs or small groups are possible once the space is genuinely large, but treat that as an experiment you supervise, and never two males together. Food competition, chasing and bitten tails end most attempts; solo is the safe default.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	24×18×36	36×18×48	Fragile and nervous; a low-stress, heavily planted setup is critical.
Juvenile	36×18×48	48×24×60	Insect hunter: live prey and climbing routes keep the animal working.
Subadult	48×24×60	48×24×72	Groups only in oversized space, and only under watch; split at first chase.
Adult	48×24×72	60×36×84	Vertical always, never a rack: dense branches, live plants, real height.

Enclosure sizes in inches, from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance for *Varanus prasinus*. Height first at every stage; a rack never suits this lizard.

03

Heat, Basking and UVB

Ambient 80–85 °F through the enclosure, with a basking surface of 95–110 °F placed high, where the animal already wants to be. Let it fall to 72–78 °F overnight. Put a branch or cork slab under the heat, never a heat rock; contact heaters burn bellies, and a lizard will often sit there while it happens. UVB is required, mounted so a basking monitor sits inside the lamp's useful range rather than well below it. Measure with a temp gun, not a guess.

04

Humidity & Water

Hold 70–90% humidity, and treat it as a daily rhythm rather than a fixed number: heavy morning misting, a real dry-down, damp again by night. Stale wet air with no airflow grows respiratory trouble, so ventilate and let the cage breathe between soakings. Give standing water big enough to soak in, changed often, because monitors foul it. Many tree monitors drink from leaves and wet branches before they ever use a bowl, so mist the furniture too.

05

Substrate, Branches and Plants

Deep, moisture-holding substrate does the humidity work for you: a cypress and soil mix, several inches, damp at the bottom and never soured. Above it, build a lattice: cork tubes, crossing branches at several diameters, cover thick enough that the animal can cross the cage without ever being visible. Live plants earn their place, as cover and as drinking surfaces both. A bare tank with one branch is the classic beginner setup, and the classic way to lose one.

06

Feeding

Insects first, and plenty of them: this is an insectivore that eats every 1–2 days, more like a bird than a snake. Roaches, crickets, hornworms and silkworms, dusted and gut-loaded, with small mice and eggs as occasional additions rather than staples. Scatter and hide prey so hunting takes effort; live insects are the enrichment. Feed from tongs or a dish, never fingers. A monitor that learns your hand means food will take the hand.

07

Health Red Flags: Appetite Goes First

The first sign is refusal to eat, and in an animal that eats every 1–2 days you will notice fast. Pair that with a monitor sitting low, flat or out in the open all day and you have a stressed or sick lizard. Watch for sunken eyes and wrinkled skin (dehydration), gaping or wet clicking breaths (respiratory infection), and swelling around the jaw. Weigh weekly. A refusal plus a weight drop is a reptile-vet call, not a wait-and-see.

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.