



Portsmouth Reptile & Amphibian Society  
P.O Box 16  
Portsmouth  
PO2 9BW

P.R.A.S Care sheet No. 5



**Species Common Name:** **Bosc's or Savannah Monitor**

**Scientific Name:** *Varanus exanthematicus*

**Care Difficulty:** Moderate; a good choice of lizard for a novice, but it should be noted that some can initially be aggressive and that they can grow relatively large.

**Distribution:**

Africa, generally south of the Sahara Desert and north of the equatorial rain forests. Bosc's monitors are the most commonly available and most popular monitor lizards in the pet trade. Most shops now sell captive bred animals however it is important to check their origin as there still are imported wild caught or captive farmed specimens, from Togo or Ghana. Records show these animals can live in excess of 15 years.

**Description:**

The Bosc is one of the smallest of the six kinds of monitor lizards found in Africa. It is a stout and robust lizard, its spotted hide is very tough and it is equipped with powerful jaws and sharp teeth, which can inflict a very painful bite. Owners must avoid situations that could result in an accident. The claws are sharp and most owners trim their adult animal's claws to prevent accidental scratches.

**Size:**

Hatchling Bosc's are about 15cm (6") in length; adults reach around 75cm but can reach to a maximum length of 100cm (39").

**Housing:**

When housing Bosc's it is important to remember that they grow rapidly from their hatchling stage. The larger the vivarium you can provide the better. For an adult a minimum size would be 120x60x60cm (47x24x24"). The structure should be sturdy and front opening, with glass that is shatter proof (4mm+). Bosc's have extremely strong

tails that they whip when agitated. Substrate for the cage can be any of a variety of materials, such as wood shavings, chippings or bark even gravel or newspaper. It should be easily replaceable, as Bosc's are messy when they defecate. Bosc's, like most large lizards need to feel secure, so a shelter must be provided. This can be as simple as a cardboard box, or more decorative like cork bark tube or a ceramic drainpipe.

These animals come from hot and arid countries. The daytime temperature should be high, 29-32°C (85-90°F), night time temperatures can be allowed to drop to 6-8°C (10-15°F). All cages have a hot or cold spot it is a good idea to find out where these are using a min max thermometer. There are several heat sources to choose from such as heat mats, tube heater and heat lamps. It is best to find the one that heats your viv the most economically for its size.

*All heaters should be behind a guard to prevent your lizard from burning itself.*

It is arguable whether Bosc's require UV light or not many specimens seem to have done very well without it, however if correctly used the benefits are well publicised. Artificial light should be provided to establish definite photoperiods that may aid breeding.

#### **Diet and Feeding:**

Bosc's are naturally opportunistic predators. They utilize their cryptic coloration to avoid detection as they search for food in the tropical savannah grasses. They eat just about any animal that they can overpower and will feed readily on carrion, (dead animals). Typical prey includes: insects (This is by far the most important food item.), eggs (all monitors love eggs), baby birds, snakes (even venomous cobras), baby tortoises, other lizards, frogs, and occasionally small mammals. Water should always be available in low sturdy dishes to avoid spillages; the ideal would be a dog bowl. They do drink regularly even though they are from arid regions. They do like to have a soak, this however leads to defecation, do not allow this to stand around and disinfect before reuse. Bosc's are not usually fussy about what they eat, which can lead to problems of obesity when adult. Hatchlings will eat crickets, mealworms, baby mice and cat food. It is advisable to add a mineral and vitamin supplement such as Nutrobal. The size of prey should increase as the animal grows, hatchlings and animals up to 30cm should be fed every 2-3 days on mice with the occasional addition of crickets and cat food. Some like boiled eggs, as a treat but it can be messy. Sub adults and adults should be fed 1 -4 adult mice or 1/2 a tin of cat food per week. If the animal appears to be getting to fat then adjust the amount. Live crickets and locusts given on an occasional basis provides some exercise.

#### **Breeding:**

Breeding of these monitors is quite tricky in captivity, due partly to the difficulty in sexing them. Methods that can be employed to sex your Bosc can cause serious damage and should not be undertaken by a novice. It should occur under veterinary guidance. Zoos have had the best success by following these guidelines:

- Obtain a sexually mature and correctly sexed pair of Bosc's, which have a good covering of flesh but are not obese.
- A rest period should be initiated by separating the pair and dropping the temperature by 5°C (10°F) for five to six weeks, decreasing the daylight to at least 14 hours darkness and reducing or stop feeding.
- After 4-6 weeks reverse the above process.
- Put the pair back together and once copulation has stopped this may take several weeks, separate the pair and provide the female with a tub of damp sand to mimic the termite mounds used for egg laying in the wild. The female deposits between 8-50 eggs. They should be incubated in 50/50 w/w vermiculite/water at 29-30°C (84-86°F) and they take 120-180 days to hatch.

**Handling:**

Once you have bought your monitor, leave it alone in its cage for a few days to get used to the change. Avoid moving suddenly around the animal. All Bosc's will bite if provoked or threatened. The threat display consists of a thrashing tail and a puffed out throat and a loud hiss. It may flatten the body either ventrally or laterally towards the aggressor. If the Bosc does bite it has the ability to lock its jaws closed. When handling a Bosc do so firmly and without hesitation. A thick pair of gloves may help to start with. Grab the Bosc behind the head to avoid bites and support the body with your other hand. If large enough tuck the tail under your arm to prevent thrashing. With regular handling most Bosc's will calm down.