

Care sheet

Australian Water Dragon

Common Name:

Water Dragon - Australian

Scientific Name:

Physignathus lesueurii

Temperament:

This Australian Water Dragon lizard is a shy and docile pet for those who take the time to treat him properly.

With its ferocious name and fairly large body, the Australian Water Dragon is an impressive lizard. Australian Water Dragons are generally not nervous like some other lizards. It is rare that Water Dragons bite; more often, they will flee if they feel threatened. It is important to handle your Australian Water Dragon with caution and patience until he is used to you. With the right treatment and care, you will have an impressive-looking pet that makes a sweet companion.

Origin or Range:

This species lives only in the far eastern part of Australia from Eastern Victoria in the South to Cairns, Queensland, in the North. The range of this lizard is limited by several factors:

1. There must be water basins (called billabong in Australia) or rivers very nearby.
2. There must be a period of at least six months in which daytime maxima are 24⁰C or over.

Therefore this lizard is lacking in Cape York or Arnhemland. This species definitely does not occur in New Guinea, as some importers have you believe. Within the range of this species night frost may occur or even occur regularly (like in Bourse, NSW).

Appearance

Males reach a total length of 2 ½ to 3 feet, and females reach 2 to 2 ½ feet in total length. The males are very beautifully colored. Males get a crest in the neck region and they get a blood red color on their belly and upper forelimbs. They have larger heads than females and the black/white design on the male's head is very strongly expressed: white lips and a deep black band behind their eyes. Females have smaller heads, dull white lips, a gray-black band behind the eye and white to pinkish bellies.

Longevity:

In captivity, the species can probably live for as long as 25 or even 28 years

Terrarium:

The terrarium size for one pair of adult water dragons should be between 4 feet long by 2 feet high by 2 feet wide (4'x2'x2') and even up to 3 feet high. A warm basking spot is also needed. In the terrarium you can place a tree branch or tree trunk on which they can climb and sit. They will probably like to bask on this so it is a good place to put the basking light and UV light nearby.

Remember that the UV lights need to be fairly close to the lizards basking spot to get the maximum absorption of UV light. If it is too far away the UV light's potency or strength is reduced quite dramatically.



They also like a place where they can both sleep and hide. The water bowl needs to be situated so that it can be cleaned easily, as they can get pretty smelly. The lizards should be able to get in and out of the water easily. Although not very elegant, we have heard of people often use new paint-roller dishes as they have a sloped "beach" area and allow the lizard to get in and out of easily.

The water bowl must be in a position where it can be cleaned very easily, as they defecate in the water. This may sound like a problem, but in fact it makes things easier for you as now the whole terrarium stays clean. Be sure the lizards can get in and out of the water easily.

The water in the enclosure should be changed daily. A 5% bleach solution is an excellent disinfectant for cleaning the cage. Be sure to thoroughly rinse the enclosure before placing the water dragon back.

It is rather easy to keep them outdoors in unheated terraria in the southern USA as the temperature range is similar to the Eastern part of Australia. They occur only in regions where there is enough winter to trigger their reproduction. In many parts of their range there is night frost in winter. These animals are able to survive quite cool temperatures and they will hide in burrows during winter.

Temperature

Temperatures should be kept at 84° - 88° F during the day with a basking temperature of 90° to 95° F. Night-time temperatures should be kept at 75° - 80° F but they will tolerate temperatures a lot lower, particularly during winter months.

Lighting:

Water dragons require UVA and UVB light. If you keep your water dragon inside you need a UVB lamp to provide ultraviolet radiation to the reptile. Please read and follow the instructions that accompany the lamp. It is always important to place the lamp at the correct height (as listed on the lamp's instructions) above the lizard basking spot. Just 2 inches higher or lower will greatly change the amount of ultraviolet radiation that the lizard will absorb.

Food

They are known to eat crickets, cockroaches, snails, earthworms, beetles, whole fish, meal worms and grubs. Shredded greens such as mustard, dandelion and collard and other vegetables such as yellow squash, sweet potato, parsnips, green beans and carrots can also be given. Some fruit such as strawberry, raspberry, blueberry, banana, and various melons can also be provided. Although some will not eat all these foods that are offered, however by giving your lizard a variety of food you will have a healthier and happier lizard. Adults may also eat pinkie rats and pinkie mice. Superworms and Deadheadroaches are also good and relatively easy to breed.

Substrate:

A variety of substrates can be used for water dragons. Sterilized potting soil can make for a very nice naturalistic enclosure but can be messy. Newspaper, paper towels, and indoor-outdoor carpeting can also be used and are easier to maintain. Cedar and pine wood shavings should be avoided due to toxicity concerns.

Defence:

When startled, Water Dragons often dive into the water and remain submerged. In the wild, they have been observed to remain underwater for as long as 55 minutes. In captivity, they may remain submerged for "over an hour".