



Nile Monitor

Common name: Nile Monitor

Latin name: *Varanus niloticus*

Local name: الورل



ECOLOGY

Type:

Wild

Role in Ecosystem:

Nile monitors are both predators (on invertebrates and small vertebrates) and scavengers. Their persistent predation on crocodile nests may serve as a control on crocodile numbers.

Termite mounds make a perfect place for Nile monitors to lay their eggs, except during the dry season when the hard clay makes it very difficult to burrow into. When the rain comes the females dig holes in the sides of termite mounds and lay their eggs. The termites quickly repair the gaping hole which protects the eggs during their development.

HABITAT

The Nile Monitor is a highly adaptable habitat generalist, being found in forest, savanna, woodland, bushland, varied aquatic habitats from mangroves to lakes and rivers, and numerous human-modified habitats. It requires the presence of some open areas for basking and is typically associated with water, particularly in the juvenile stage. While largely terrestrial as an adult, the Nile Monitor can also be found climbing trees and rocks, and it is a strong and active swimmer. When inactive it can be found basking on waterside vegetation, in trees, or on logs or rocks.



Food

Carnivore

Nile monitors are stealthy hunters, concluding their predatory quests by pouncing with lightning speed on their prey. This species eats most animal prey it can overpower, including both vertebrate and invertebrate prey items as well as crocodile eggs. In Southern Africa, adults feed regularly on freshwater crabs, while juveniles feed on frogs and invertebrates. In the dry season particularly, up to 50% of the diet can consist of carrion. It is also a predator of freshwater turtle nests. Animals may aestivate or enter a prolonged period of torpor or dormancy during the hot dry season.



Movement and Communication

When inactive, Nile monitors bask or rest on waterside vegetation, trees, logs, and rocks, often in a prominent position. In the colder parts of South Africa, it hibernates in big rock cracks or burrows. When walking and foraging, the monitor holds its body well off the ground and uses its long, forked tongue to sense potential food sources. Nile monitors are usually wary and if approached, will run away or jump into water, even from a considerable height. They are powerful swimmers. If cornered and threatened, a Nile monitor will arch its back and stand at full stretch on its legs, hissing as the body inflates and flicking the tail sideways. The lashing tail can inflict a painful wound. As a last resort a cornered Nile monitor will bite and eject foul-smelling musk from the cloaca to deter attack or throw off a pursuer.



Social Habits

Solitary

Nile monitors are usually solitary, with only occasional intraspecies interaction outside the mating season.



Reproduction

Oviparous

Nile monitors are a polygynandrous species and will mate promiscuously. The males may fight each other, presumably due to competition for mating opportunities.

It breeds once annually, with the season starting in June and ending in October range-wide. Mating and egg-laying usually follow the rainy season, which varies regionally. This season correlates with the development of the gonads. The testicles of males are enlarged from June until September while the females are being sought. Regression of the gonads subsequently occurs until January and then the cycle recommences.

After spring rains (August through September), the female excavates a hole in the ground or in an active termite nest and lays 20 to 60 eggs. This may take 2-3 days to complete. If she lays her eggs in a termite nest, the termites will repair the hole in their nest, and the monitor eggs develop inside. Eggs may take up to 1 year to hatch. The small young weigh an average 26g upon hatching. After hatching, the young may need to wait for rain to soften the hard nest, or reportedly the mother monitor may return at the right time and open the nest to free the hatchlings. Once they have emerged, however, the baby Nile monitors are on their own.

Attributes

Appearance:

Adult Nile monitors are brownish or greenish-gray, with darker reticulation and yellowish spots or stripes on the back and limbs and yellowish-green spots on the head. Ventral surfaces are yellowish with blackish cross-bands. Juveniles are black, with the head bearing yellow cross-lines with black and yellow vertical bars on the lips. The neck features yellow lines and the back has a transverse series of yellow spots. The tail of juveniles has alternating black and yellow bars. This species exhibits no sexual dimorphism.

Length:

2.4 m

INTRODUCTION

The Nile Monitor is a highly adaptable habitat generalist, being found in forests, savanna, woodland, bushland, varied aquatic habitats from mangroves to lakes and rivers, and numerous human-modified habitats. This largely tropical African species occurs throughout sub-Saharan Africa below 18° latitude. These monitors are heavily exploited for their skin, which is used as leather.

LIVELIHOODS AND CULTURE

Human interaction

This species is found in the international pet trade, and is also exploited for leather and food. In the period 2010–18, 369,210 skins of wild-sourced specimens were traded for the international leather industry, and 48,958 live specimens (sourced wild and ranches) (CITES trade database). Animals of all life stages are consumed in some regions in Sudan. The skin and fat of this species are used in the local African traditional medicine.

Cultural value

Various Sudanese tribes have stories and myths centered on the Nile Monitor.

Cultural expression

A Sudanese proverb "In a country without crocodiles, the monitor is strutting around." The meaning is that in a land without real heroes, the less powerful ones find an opportunity to show off.

THREATS

In parts of Africa these monitors are heavily exploited for their skin, which is used as leather. Young animals may often be offered to tourists as pets or curios. Nonetheless, in large parts of its range this species remains common and not subject to threats. The species is regionally utilised for bush meat and traditional medicine.

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