
NEWS NOTES

Bengal Monitor Population Declining in Seshachalam Hills, India

Bengal monitors (*Varanus bengalensis*) are reported to be in serious decline in the Seshachalam Hills area of the Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh, India due to poaching. Parts from the lizards are claimed to be aphrodisiacs, with the tongue and liver being especially prized. Villagers who capture them may sell a single specimen for as much as Rs 5,000 (~ \$78 US). Although the species is protected, such protections are poorly known in areas occupied by the species and are widely ignored. Habitat loss has also played a role in the animal's disappearance from the region, which started a decade ago.

Source: *The Hindu*, 18 January 2017

Trade in Bengal Monitor Sexual Organs Revealed

Indian wildlife officials have announced the discovery of an online-based trade in wildlife including the dried hemipenes of Bengal monitors (*Varanus bengalensis*), a protected species. The discovery was made following a raid on a house in Brahmeswarpatna in Odisha (formerly Orissa), India in which the organs from more than two hundred monitors were seized. The dried hemipenes were allegedly being sold as plant roots with magical, curative properties. Monitors are in high demand both in



Varanus mertensi. Litchfield NP, Northern Territory. Photograph by **Chris Applin**.

India and throughout Asia both for their meat as well as for their fat and oil which are claimed (without evidence) to cure various ailments including bone fractures and chronic pain. Authorities are now trying to determine this the source of the specimens.

Sources: *The Times of India*, 30 May 2017; *Hindustan Times*, 21 June 2017

Komodo Dragon Dies at Louisville Zoo

A male Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*), the facility's only specimen, has been euthanized at the Louisville Zoo (USA). The twenty-three year old animal, nicknamed "Big Man", first arrived at the facility in 1994 from the Cincinnati Zoo. At the time of its death, it was the second oldest dragon in the United States. Zoo staff first noted that the dragon showed difficulty moving in April 2016. The cause was believed to be a compressive spinal cord lesion high in the neck (a problem that has been seen before in captive dragons). Initial steroid treatment was successful, but the dragon eventually stopped responding. After surgery was ruled out, zoo staff made the decision of euthanasia. A zoo spokesman said they hope to find a replacement specimen soon.

Source: *Courier-Journal*, 22 February 2017

Bengal Monitor Stows Away in Tourist's Suitcase

A juvenile clouded monitor (*Varanus bengalensis nebulosus*) stowed away in the luggage of a British tourist returning from a trip to Thailand. The ca. 16 cm long lizard was discovered in a suitcase containing diving equipment after the owner had returned to his home in Derbyshire. Authorities were notified, who then retrieved the lizard and took it to a specialist exotics center where it was determined to be in good health. Officials are now seeking permission from Thai officials to place the lizard in a zoo.

Source: *www.upi.com*, 10 April 2017

Virginia Aquarium Announces Genders of Juvenile Komodo Dragons

The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center (USA) has announced that the two Komodo dragons (*Varanus komodoensis*) hatched at the facility in August 2016 are both males. The two are the offspring of Teman and Jude, a male and female pair who were on loan from the Denver and San Antonio Zoos, respectively. Jude developed egg-yolk coelomitis and was euthanized in 2016 following complications after surgery. However, prior to her passing, Jude had dug a nest and laid eighteen eggs which managed to escape the attention of zoo staff for seven months until two hatchlings were observed during routine exhibit cleaning. Of the clutch, only two eggs hatched. The offspring are now one meter in length and were considered large enough for blood to be drawn for DNA testing to determine their genders. Aquarium officials hope to place the two on public display sometime this summer, although one will eventually go to San Antonio Zoo.

Source: *The Virginian-Pilot*, 13 April 2017

Tourist Bitten by Komodo Dragon

A Singaporean tourist was bitten and severely injured by a wild Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*) while watching the animals feed. According to Komodo National Park officials, the victim, a 50-year-old man, was watching several dragons feed on livestock belonging to villagers. Ignoring warnings, he approached the animals to take photographs and was then bitten on his left leg. Locals immediately pulled him away and took him to a nearby medical center in Labuan Bajo, Flores for first aid. He was later taken to Siloam General Hospital on Java. Although the specific site (and island) where the attack took place was not mentioned, park officials stated that the tourist had been staying with locals and that the attack occurred outside of designated dragon viewing areas. This represents the first incident of a human being bitten by a wild Komodo dragon in the past five years.

Sources: *The Jakarta Post*, 3 May 2017; www.bbc.com,

4 May 2017; *The Telegraph*, 4 May 2017

Questionable Practices Surrounding Monitor Lizard Deaths at Delhi Zoo

A recent investigation into several monitor lizard deaths at the National Zoological Park, or Delhi Zoo (India) has uncovered questionable record keeping practices that appear to attempt to hide the deaths and replacement of these individuals (species not identified, but likely *Varanus bengalensis*). Five monitor lizards allegedly died at the zoo between November 2016 and early January 2017, and were secretly replaced with another four individuals in January. These four replacement animals reportedly died shortly after their arrival in early February, allegedly due to shock associated with being “disturbed from hibernation.” Two of these animals reportedly died the same day as their “disturbance”, whereas the other two perished a few days later.

Inconsistencies in the zoo’s collection records of how many individuals were on hand, and questionable dietary records documenting food rations for the monitor lizards during January 2016 suggest foul play. All animal deaths are required to be reported to the Central Zoo Authority; however, the Delhi Zoo’s ranger alleges that the keeper and head keeper were instructed to hide the transfer of the replacement monitor lizards. This investigation is ongoing.

Source: *The Indian Express*, 25 February 2017



Varanus baritji. Adelaide River, Northern Territory. Photograph by **Chris Applin**.



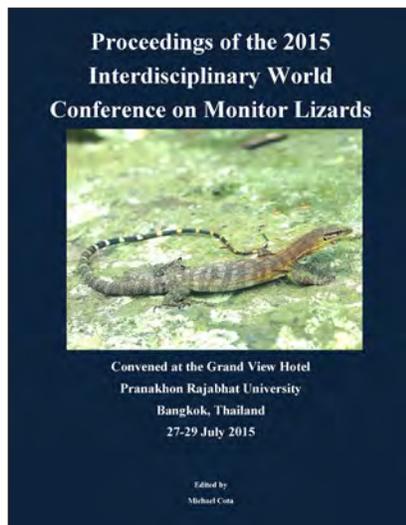
Successful captive breeding of *Varanus cumingi* at Cologne Zoo. Photographs courtesy of **Thomas Ziegler**.

Varanus cumingi Hatch at Cologne Zoo

A total of five *Varanus cumingi* recently hatched at the Cologne Zoo (DE). The zoo acquired the species as a confiscation in 2010 and these animals were integrated into the zoo's Philippines exhibit, next to its Philippine crocodile enclosure; additional specimens were maintained in off-exhibit areas. From this initial group, all individuals proved to be male. To acquire specimens of both sexes, some individuals were exchanged for *V. cumingi* from Augsburg Zoo (DE) in March 2016.

Mating occurred in mid-October 2016, with eggs laid on 16 November 2016. The eggs were incubated at temperatures ranging from 29–31.5 °C, with hatching taking place between 22 and 27 May 2017. The five hatchlings ranged from 12.1–13.4 cm in snout-to-vent length and 30.1–32.4 cm in total length, and weighed between 31 and 36 g. Further mating occurred in April 2017, with a clutch of nine eggs laid on 14 May which are currently incubating. Officials plan to eventually display some of the offspring at the zoo.

Source: Thomas Ziegler and Anna Rauhaus, Cologne Zoo



Proceedings of the 2015 Interdisciplinary World Conference on Monitor Lizards

The published proceedings of the Interdisciplinary World Conference on Monitor Lizards held in Bangkok, Thailand from 27-29 July 2015 is now available for purchase. The price is \$35.00 US plus shipping from Thailand. Due to a limited print run, only a limited number of copies are available.

Please contact **Michael Cota** at Herpetologe@gmail.com to order and for further information.