

VaraNews

VaraNews is published by Varanix, the Varanid Information Exchange, dedicated to the preservation of monitor lizards through education and the exchange of information relating to all aspects of care in captivity.

Volume 1 Issue 0

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■ General Info

This is Number 0 of VaraNews, the newsletter of Varanix, the VARANid Information eXchange.

The 'big picture' goal of Varanix is to promote the responsible care and maintenance of Varanids through education and the understanding of their special needs. Although the focus is on Varanids, there is no implied exclusion of other herps. In fact, somewhere along the way the idea of appealing to Tegu-ists came up...sounds like a natural fit. Let's hear from you folks, too!

This exchange is an open forum to anyone interested in getting involved. Involvement, both passive and active, in Varanix does by no means require that an individual keep monitors. Whatever the positive motivation, participation is welcome.

Another goal of Varanix is to inform the potential adoptive caretaker about Varanids. Both the short- and long-term responsibilities that go with keeping large reptiles must be put on the table... responsibilities to the animal, to the individual, and to the public. The hobbyist must realize beforehand that a monitor cannot be thought of as a 'pet lizard' in the traditional sense, but that special handling and accommodations are required. (The trick is to provide education before acquisition!)

How does Varanix hope to improve the lot of these splendid creatures in captivity? Possibilities include:

- serve as an open forum for the discussion of husbandry techniques, both successful and unsuccessful
- author species-specific care sheets
- author educational literature for all age ranges
- promote successful breeding programs
- print a photo catalog of various species

There is no cast-in-concrete charter for Varanix. The ideas listed above were generated through discussion and correspondence among a handful of individuals. All input...suggestions, criticisms, anecdotes, articles...from you, the reader, is welcome.

Every tidbit of information you have to offer is of interest, be it a copy of a news clipping or article, or simply a quick note sharing how you dealt with a problem. No matter how rough the input, the information is of value to all of us.

In addition to inclusion in VaraNews, information will be maintained in an information database. This can lead to periodic publication of pamphlets and booklets. Possibilities include a compilation of Q&A and a list of shops and zoos worth visiting, grouped by geographic region.

VaraNews will be sent to anyone expressing an interest. It will be sent gratis (hopefully, at least every 2 months) until the number of copies reaches a point that mailing becomes too expensive. You are invited to copy and distribute this newsletter.

If you would like to be on the mailing list, send your request to:

Greg Naclerio
8726D S. Sepulveda Bl. #243
Los Angeles, CA 90045

Attn: VaraNews

If you would also like a copy of the 'Info Kit' that was sent to the first respondents, please request it. The kit includes an explanation of the motivating factors behind Varanix, my background as it relates to the endeavor and a questionnaire about your animals and your interests as they relate to Varanids. The Info Kit will only be sent to those who request it. It is by no means mandatory for involvement in Varanix.

Involvement

At the moment, there are a few projects that could benefit from some additional input. Those that come immediately to mind follow.

- If you would like to help send copies of VaraNews to herp societies, zoos, etc., let me know and I will

send you the copies and a list of those who have not yet been sent one. Please state how many you are willing to send (i.e., how many envelopes and postage stamps are you willing to donate?) I currently have a list of about 100 herp societies, zoos, etc.

- If you would like to review issues of VaraNews prior to general distribution, please let me know. It is important to avoid any misinformation or statements that could be misinterpreted in a negative manner.
- Send in a logo for this newsletter, whether it is a finished drawing or an inspirational sketch. I will use the graphic tools at my disposal to render a finished image.
- Send the name, address and phone number of zoos, stores, etc. which you feel are worth visiting when in the area. Providing the nearest main cross streets and a brief description of what makes the place worth visiting would be helpful. This list would be useful when travelling and looking for the 'herp hot spots' in town.

Futures

Future issues will contain photos and graphics to 'liven up' the newsletter. If you would like to see your favorite Varanid in print, you are invited to send a photo and caption/story. (If you want the photo back, please make a note of it... of course, a SASE would be appreciated.)

Q & A

This is the question and answer section. Questions will be reviewed and responded to. In the event there are no reliable resources available to answer a question before publication, it may be posted here for response by the general readership. Best efforts will be made to provide accurate information. It is hoped that any reader disagreeing with a response will raise the point for all to benefit. Remember, the non-recompensed effort behind this newsletter is to help all involved maintain the best possible environment for their animals.

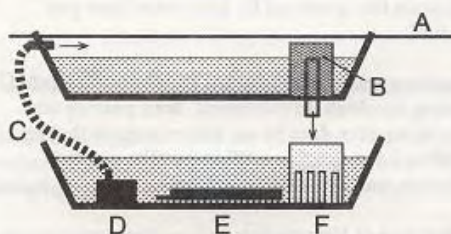
Tips & Tricks

This section is designed to present useful husbandry techniques. Discussion could cover such topics as food, habitat design (which in itself contains many sub-topics such as, heating, water, substrate, and maintenance) and breeding.

Below I have offered a description of the water system I currently use in one of my habitats.

Inexpensive 'Water Hole'

The following water system is set up in a 48 in x 60 in x 30 in (122 cm x 152 cm x 76 cm) habitat which houses 4 *Varanus niloticus*. As of May 1990, they ranged in size from 26 in (66 cm) TL to 34 in (86 cm) TL. The entire system is constructed of second-hand aquarium equipment and inexpensive hardware store items.



- A habitat floor
- B filter cartridge (from Magnum 330 canister filter)
- C 1/2" diameter vinyl tubing
- D powerhead (rated 150 gph)
- E submersible aquarium heater
- F 4" length of leach pipe, or PVC with slots cut

Construction

Two new plastic cement-mixing trays are used: one in the cage (upper) and one below the cage (reservoir). These 26 in x 18 in x 6 in (66 cm x 46 cm x 15 cm) trays are durable and can usually be found at hardware stores for about \$5.

There is a strong rim around the top edge of the trays. The floor of the habitat where the upper tank is to be placed should be cutout just enough for the tray to fit through the hole, but such that the rim rests on the habitat floor. As the trays are about 6 in (15 cm) tall, there must be enough room underneath the upper tank such that the reservoir can be slid in and out for cleaning. Allowing about 8 in (20 cm) clearance below the bottom of the upper tank should do. Note that the

reservoir should be positioned such that a support can be placed underneath the top tank so that all the weight is not carried by the tank rim.

Two holes must be cut in the water (upper) tank: one in the side for the inlet and one in the bottom for the drain. The bulkhead fittings were made from standard PVC fittings. The drain fitting must accommodate a 4 in length of 1/2 in PVC which serves as the overflow pipe. The fit of the overflow into the drain bulkhead must be snug enough to hold the pipe tight, yet allow it to be removed when completely draining the tank for a thorough cleaning.

For the drain bulkhead, a 1/2 in PVC coupling which has a slip-fit on one end and is threaded (male) on the other end is used. The slip-fit end is cut to about 3/8 in deep, in which the overflow pipe is placed. The slip-fit side is cut (or drilled) to allow most of the water to drain out during a complete drain & scrub. (If it were not cut, the lowest possible water level would be about 1 in, the depth of the slip-fit side.) The threaded end is extended through the drain hole and tightened to the tank from the bottom with a slip-fit/female-threaded coupling. A rubber washer is used on each side.

The filter cartridge is used to pre-filter water before it drains into the reservoir. The filter sleeve is slipped over it the cartridge, which is filled halfway with carbon. A couple of rubberbands, one around the top and another around the bottom, help keep a snug fit, allowing the sleeve to do its job. The entire unit is then slid on the overflow pipe. (At least with the Magnum cartridge, this is a snug fit.)

One end of the 1/2 in vinyl tubing is fit to the powerhead and the other is pushed through the inlet fitting, short of protruding into the upper tank. (This should be a tight fit to keep the hose from accidentally slipping out and pumping 7 or 8 gallons of water wherever it decides to land.)

The aquarium heater is actually raised off the reservoir bottom (not depicted in the diagram). A couple of 2" PVC couplings are slipped around it, raising it about a 1/4 in. (I didn't like the idea of it laying flush on the bottom.)

The powerhead and leach pipe (a 4 in diameter PVC pipe with holes drilled in it) simply rest on the bottom of the reservoir. The leach pipe minimizes splash and evaporation to some degree...this is not really a major player in the overall design.

Several rocks are placed in the water tank, a couple reaching to the surface of the water.

Operation and Maintenance

The power head pumps water from the reservoir to the water tank. The macro-waste is filtered by the filter sleeve as the water returns to the reservoir through the overflow pipe, which maintains the water level at 4 in.

Debris is removed on an as-required basis. The power head is unplugged, the rocks are removed and waste is scooped with a 'dedicated' fishnet. The filter sleeve and cartridge are also rinsed.

After a period of time, enough particulate matter slips through the filter sleeve to warrant a complete draining and scrubbing/disinfecting. The frequency obviously depends on the number of animals and how often they defecate in the water (this is at least 90% of the time for my four monitors.) In my case, a scrub-down of the tanks every 4-6 weeks seems adequate.

N.B. Before draining the reservoir, DON'T FORGET to unplug the aquarium heater. This should be done 10 minutes or so in advance to allow it to gradually cool down in the event it was on.

The easiest way to completely drain the system is to connect a piece of vinyl tubing to the drain pipe and route it to the lawn, toilet, bucket, ... This allows the powerhead to do the majority of the work. (Note that the powerhead will not pump too far uphill.)

When it can pump no more, unplug the powerhead. The reservoir can be slid out, dumped and cleaned.

A gradually rising water level in the upper tank is an indicator of a clogged filter sleeve. The sleeve can be slipped off the cartridge and rinsed. They tend to stretch after a while and need to be replaced. Most any brand that gives a snug fit will work.

I add water to the reservoir as required to replace that which is lost due to evaporation.

Improvements

The current design is simple, straightforward and relatively inexpensive. I would prefer to have the filter cartridge external to the habitat, but this would require additional design work. The desire to externalize the filter is not only for aesthetic reasons. There is always the possibility that one of the inhabitants could knock the filter and the overflow pipe loose, resulting in about 12 gallons of water trying to fit into a 7 (usable) gallon reservoir! This has not happened in the 3 years the system has been setup. But, as *mes varans* get bigger and stronger...

■ Publications

This section will include a list of notable books, magazines, newsletter articles, etc. of interest to Varanix members. Contribution to this section can be as simple as jotting down and sending in the title, author, publisher and publication date/issue of a book or magazine. Any additional info, such as cost, where to purchase and a few comments on the publication's focus and usefulness would also be helpful. These items will also go into a publications database for future reference.

Paul Gritis of Bethlehem, PA has been most helpful in keeping me abreast of his latest publications dealing with monitors. A Post-it with a list of the titles relating to Varanids accompanies each book list.

A brief listing of current selections (list number 90-2, I believe) includes:

- #97 A NEW SUBSPECIES OF VARANUS EXANTHEMATICUS, 1964
- #113 REPTILES OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS, 1980
- #118 "The Family of monitors (Varanidae). Part 3: Taxonomy", 1942
- #119 "The subspecies of the desert monitor (Varanus griseus), 1954
- #129 "The skull of the Indian monitor, Varanus flavescens, 1959
- #132 "Papusaurus, a new subgenus of Varanus", 1962
- #135 "A re-examined new monitor: Varanus swarti", 1964
- #140 "A new pigmy monitor from Australia", 1966
- #147 "The 'Dragon of Babylon' was not a monitor", 1969
- #151 "A collection of monitor lizards from eastern New Guinea", 1971
- #192 THE COLD-BLOODED AUSTRALIANS, 1985
- #217 KROKODILE UNDECHSEN IN FARBE

For pricing and availability, contact Paul at the address listed in the Classified Ad section.

If there are any other book vendors who wish to offer the same service, send a price list and indicate which items would be of interest to readers of this newsletter.

■ Méli-mélo

This section will contain various and sundry bits of information, including amusing stories, quips and anecdotes. For example, how many times have you heard this one:

WHY WOULD ANYONE KEEP A REPTILE AS A PET?

Some of the responses I use are:

- They don't have fleas.
- They don't bark.
- They don't have to be fed every day.
- They don't get hair all over the place.

■ Classified Ads

Reasonable-length line ads are welcome. They should somehow relate to the intended audience of this newsletter.

Herpetology Books - For a free list, write to:
Paul Gritis, 1731 W. Market #12, Bethlehem, PA 18018
(215) 867-9723 (evenings and weekends)

The goal of Varanix, the Varanid Information Exchange, is to serve the interests of Varanids and Varanid-keepers throughout the world. A primary function of the Exchange is to build and maintain a knowledge base that will help improve the standard of living of these magnificent creatures in the captive world.

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All inquiries about Varanix can be directed to:

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