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# NEWS NOTES

## Monitor Disrupts Court Proceedings

A large monitor lizard (“the type found in water”-presumably *Varanus niloticus*) caused a panic when it appeared in a Zimbabwe courtroom at the trial of four men accused of smuggling generators. The animal was discovered hiding in the witness box prior to the start of the trial. After court personnel and spectators fled, locals chased the lizard out and attempted to kill it before it fled. The trial was postponed and the defendants denied any connection to the monitor’s appearance.

Source: *New Zimbabwe*, 29 April 2010

## Audubon Zoo Displays Komodo Dragon

The Audubon Zoo in New Orleans has added a Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*) to its collection; an 18 year-old male nicknamed “Stumpy” due to its missing much of its tail from when as a hatchling it was bitten off by a sibling. “Stumpy” was hatched in 1992 at the National Zoo making him among the first dragons to be produced in captivity outside of Indonesia.

Source: *Zoo and Aquarium Visitor*, 26 April 2010

## Multiple New Varanids Discovered

Since the beginning of April, five new varanid taxa have been described representing four species and a subspecies. The first of these, *Varanus bitatawa*, is the third frugivorous monitor to be described from the Philippines. Photographs of this animal had been known as early as 2001 and four years later the first specimen was collected. *Varanus bitatawa* is known only from the Sierra Madre Mountains of northern Luzon. Like the related frugivorous monitor species, it is believed to be critically endangered. Also in April, *V. obor* – the first melanistic member of the *V. indicus* species-complex to be named – was described from Sanana in the Sula Archipelago. The species was described from a specimen collected during the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century as well as from field observations. Although *obor* occurs widely on Sanana, its limited distribution leaves it vulnerable to various threats such as habitat destruction and collecting pressure. In May, a revision of Philippine water monitors (*V. salvator* species-complex) produced three new forms. *Varanus palawanensis* and *V. rasmusseni* represent melanistic species separated from what were formerly considered populations of *V. marmoratus*; *V. palawanensis* from a disjunct distribution including Greater Palawan and Sibutu in the Sulu Archipelago and *V. rasmusseni* from Tawi-Tawi in the Sulu Archipelago.



*Varanus bengalensis bengalensis* feeding on millipede. Sinharaja, Sri Lanka. 27 January 2009. Photograph by **Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne**

Both species are believed to have more extensive distributions than is known. In addition, the dark phenotype of *V. cumingi* from Samar, Leyte, and Bohol was reclassified as a distinct subspecies: *V. cumingi samarensis*. Other aspects of Philippine water monitor taxonomy remain to be resolved including the identity of *marmoratus*-type monitors found on Mindoro.

Sources: *Biology Letters* doi:10.1098/rsbl.2010.0119 (*bitatawa*); *Zootaxa* 2434: 1-54 (*obor*); *Zootaxa* 2446: 1-54 (*Philippine water monitors*)

## Worker Attacked by Komodo Dragon

An Indonesian worker on the island of Rinca was attacked and bitten by a two meter Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*) as he was laboring inside a bungalow. The dragon ceased the attack after the man hit the animal in the jaws several times. He was taken to a clinic on Bali for treatment of lacerations and a puncture wound.

Source: *The Associated Press*, 24 May 2010

## Report from the Second Annual Meeting of the AG Warane

As in the previous year, the second annual meeting of the AG Warane of the DGHT took place on 24 April 2010 in Hanau near Frankfurt. The thirty-five participants of the meeting represented zoos, private keepers, and scientists. Although the location and program had been finalized well in advance, the program was altered at the last minute because Ursula Bauer (Berlin), executive secretary of Aktion Tier e.V. (a German animal welfare organization), was invited to the meeting on the initiative of Frank Mohr (Würzburg, <http://forum.waranwelt.de>) due to some recent cases of inappropriate handling and keeping of reptiles (e.g., the case of an escaped cobra in Mühlheim). Subsequently, Aktion Tier had begun a campaign against the keeping of dangerous and exotic animals in captivity (see <http://www.aktiontier.org/index.php?m=22&id=684&sub=722>) which prompted a public discussion on the topic. Silvia Macina (Hamburg), executive secretary of the DGHT, also arrived for the discussion in order to facilitate an exchange of thoughts and views between animal keepers and animal rights activists. Because of this new item on the agenda, the afternoon talks were pushed back, and time for a debate was included after the lunch break.



Juvenile *Varanus niloticus*. Ruaha National Park, Tanzania. Photograph by **Marcel van Driel**.

The program began with a joint talk by Klaus Wesiak (Frankfurt on the Main) and André Koch (Museum A. Koenig, Bonn) on the successful keeping and breeding of *Varanus juxtindicus* (see *Biawak* 3(4):106-121). Following the lunch break and a photograph of all participants, the debate with Aktion Tier took place. The discussion was opened by Silvia Macina, who reported on the current efforts of the DGHT in regards to the public discussion about the keeping of dangerous animals in Germany. Her detailed statements demonstrated the importance of the cooperation between the DGHT and responsible authorities of the various German federal states. Afterwards, Ursula Bauer from Aktion Tier discussed their campaign against the keeping of exotic animals in captivity with the attending members of the AG Warane. Prior to the meeting, heated discussions about the postulations of the animal welfare organization were caused by a controversial television documentary by Aktion Tier. Within the objective, but emotional discussion, some biased opinions were corrected. It soon became obvious that both parties shared one common goal: to guarantee the reasonable and responsible husbandry of reptiles in captivity. Bad seeds among reptile keepers should be identified, and access to dangerous animals such as venomous snakes and large monitor lizards should be better controlled. To

achieve this goal, comprehensive educational work is necessary for newcomers. The general agreement was that the discussion between animal rights activists and animal keepers should continue in the future.

Following the debate, Thomas Hörenberg (Stuttgart) gave a lecture on the husbandry and breeding of *V. macraei*, and a successful caesarean section in *V. tristis orientalis*. In another afternoon talk, Monika Labes (Germering) gave a power point presentation on the husbandry and breeding of *V. exanthematicus*. Her detailed data provided a good overview of the development of the juveniles. After a short coffee break, André Koch (ZFMK, Bonn) talked about the discovery of some new Southeast Asian monitor lizards (see page 69 of this issue). The long meeting was concluded with a talk by Jochen Meyer (Stuttgart) on the captive breeding of *V. rudicollis*.

The general meeting of the AG Warane, with the election and appointment of new board members, will take place on 4 September 2010 during the annual meeting of the DGHT at the Senckenberg Museum in Frankfurt on the main. Further information will be available soon on the AG Warane homepage at [www.agwarane.de](http://www.agwarane.de), or contact Kay Uwe Dittmar (working group leader) at [dittmar@ag-warane.de](mailto:dittmar@ag-warane.de) or André Koch (scientific leader) at [a.koch.zfmk@uni-bonn.de](mailto:a.koch.zfmk@uni-bonn.de).



Attendees of the second annual meeting of the AG Warane held in Hanau, Germany on 24 April 2010.