**Savannah Care**

 **Housing**In the long run, it is less expensive to buy an enclosure for your monitor to grow into, rather than to save some money and buy a small enclosure that will not last more than six months or so. Start with a thirty gallon tank at the least; a fifty-five or sixty gallon is even better. You will still need to quickly start planning the enclosure it will be housed in when full grown. At three feet long, it will require an enclosure at least six feet long (preferably longer) and 24 inches wide. The taller it is, the less likely it will be able to climb out (and they are agile and persistent climbers!). Stay away from open-mesh enclosures as these monitors must be kept warm and, unless you live in a consistently warm environment yourself, it will be costly and complicated to get such an enclosure heated to the proper temperature.

Wood enclosures are the best type for all monitors. Glass does not hold heat or humidity well. Wood simulates the moisture and heat found in their natural environment.

Stay away from screen-sided or topped enclosures (hardware cloth tops are acceptable). Savannahs have incredibly sharp claws, and can easily shred a hole in screen. Make sure that the walls, floor and ceiling are securely attached to each other. If the savannah finds a weak spot, it will work at it and work at it until it works a hole just big enough for it to squeeze through. Along the same lines, keep the enclosure away from drapes, expensive lamps, computer equipment, etc. When taken out of the enclosure, savannahs will scrabble around trying to hook their claws into anything they can.

**Heat**Savannahs come from hot, dry environments--the savannahs of central and sub-Sahara Africa. During the day, temperatures should range from 85-90 F (29-32 C). At night, it can drop about 10-15 degrees, to 75-85 F (24-29 C).

Heat should be provided in two ways: a sub-tank or sub-substrate heating pad under half the tank, and a basking area; eventually, you may wish to purchase a fiberglass pig blanket and connect it to a thermostat. Heat tapes, incandescent lights, ceramic heating elements are all suitable for providing heat. Use whatever combination is necessary to maintain the proper temperature ranges day and night, and without stressing the monitor at night by burning a white light for heat. A slightly more expensive way to heat the monitor is to keep the room warm, usually by use of a space heater.

NEVER use heat rocks. They will eventually burn or electrocute your pet.

**Substrate**
Bioactive soil is the best. (I can provide a sheet on how to make this) The soil should be at least 18 inches deep to allow for digging and burrowing and humidity up keep.

**Shelter**Savannahs like their privacy. Provide shelters at both ends of the gradient. Commercially available "caves" and half-logs work well for small monitors, but they become prohibitively expensive or impossible to find in a size suitable for full grown savannahs. Larger monitors can be provided wooden shelters; they can be decorated with rock, mosses, bark, etc. to "dress" them up. Keep in mind that, when designing a naturalistic terrarium, monitors come from rather sere surroundings.

**Lighting**Monitors, like other lizards, need UVB lighting for calcium metabolism, and a regular photoperiod. Use UVB-producing Mercury Vapor Bulb plugged into a household appliance timer. Set the timer to be one 10-12 hours a day, slightly less during the winter. If you can provide real sunlight, either coming in through a window screen (not glass or Plexiglas), or in a semi-shaded secured area out-of-doors on a regular basis, you may be able to do without as much artificial supplementation.

**Food**A healthy savannah will feed just about any time you offer food; one that does not willingly eat (and who is not in a seasonal hibernation or breeding season), then your monitor is very likely ill.

Hatchlings can be started on crickets, earthworms, Zoophobas ("king" worms) and pink mice. Feed insects that are no bigger than 2/3 the length of the lizard's head, and start on pinkies when the monitor is a couple of months old and have grown large enough for them.

As the hatchling grows bigger, switch to fuzzy mice and larger insects. Savannahs are secretive, especially small ones who are prey for other, larger, animals. The exercise they get chasing the crickets is good for them, so do feed them crickets during this period as long as they will take them.

Savannahs need a good variety of food. Mice, baby chicks, eggs, fish and large insects are all good food items for Savannahs. Make sure to change it up and give them variety in their diet so they get all the nutrients they require to stay healthy and grow properly.

***Warning:***Dog and Cat food and other commercially prepared non-whole prey foods may be harmful. Whole prey items should ultimately be the staple food source in your monitor's regular diet. [Hepatic lipidosis](http://www.anapsid.org/heplipidosis.html) due to a high fat diet and too little exercise is an all too common disease - often a lethal one - in opportunistic feeders like savannahs and so care must be taken to focus the diet on whole prey other than as absolutely needed.

**Feeding**Savannahs will easily eat pre-killed prey. When using frozen prey, be sure to defrost it thoroughly and warm it slightly before offering it to the monitor. Do this using warm water or heat lamps…do not cook the food.

For safety's sake, offer monitors their prey by dangling it from forceps or kitchen tongs.

The greatest period of growth is within the first two-three years, and this is the period when the greatest amount of food will be required. Feed hatchlings (up to one foot in length) one to four small mice or other prey every two-three days.

Adults (three or more feet in length) can be fed twice a week, adjusted as necessary based on weight gain and amount of exercise. Obesity in savannahs, a serious health condition caused by improper husbandry, is all too common in captivity. You will have to use your judgment, observing how the monitor looks, taking into consideration the temperature and amount of activity. On average 6- 8 prey items a week should be offered.

**Water**Despite some accounts, savannahs do enjoy soaking. Provide them with a water bowl or tub big enough for them to submerge themselves (they can stay under water for extended periods of time). They will drink their water, and may defecate in it, so the bowl must be checked at least once a day to keep it clean and filled. Savannahs are also handy at tipping over water tubs, so make sure to use sturdy, bottom-heavy crocks or tubs.