



KOMODO DRAGON

Squamata
Family: Varanidae
Genus: *Varanus*
Species: *komodoensis*



Range: four volcanic Indonesian islands of the Lesser Sunda group

Habitat: dry, open grassland, savanna, and tropical forest at low elevations.

Niche: Diurnal (some nocturnal activity), carnivorous (mostly carrion), terrestrial (young- arboreal)

Wild diet: juveniles: insects, birds & small mammals; adults: deer, pigs, & water buffalo; all ages scavenge carcasses.

Zoo diet: small mice; fed 3x/week until 2 years; fed 2x/week at 2 years.

Life Span: (Wild) 25+ years

Sexual dimorphism: males tend to grow larger and bulkier than females

Located in SF Zoo: Bird short string

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Komodo dragons are the largest living lizard, with a long, flat head, rounded snout, scaly skin, bowed legs, and huge, muscular tails, which are as long as its body. Their skin is reinforced by armored scales, which contain tiny bones called osteoderms that function as a natural chain-mail. These lizards have long curved claws on all four feet used for climbing when younger and weapons as they mature. They are capable of running rapidly in brief sprints up to 12 mph.

The Komodo dragon has visible ear holes but does not have an acute sense of hearing. They use their long, yellow forked tongue to detect, taste, and smell stimuli with its Jacobson's organ. Komodos swing their heads side to side as they walk, in order to detect carrion over 5 miles away. Some of the lizard's scales have sensory plaques connected to nerves to facilitate their sense of touch, with the scales around their ears, lips, chin, and soles of the feet having up to three or more sensory plaques. Their eyes are better at picking up movement than at discerning stationary objects and are able to distinguish color but have poor vision in dim light.

Weight: M - 300 lbs
F - 150 lbs
Length: M 9 ft
F 7 ft

The Komodo dragon has about 60 frequently replaced, serrated teeth that can measure up to one inch. They ambush prey and deliver venomous bites that lower blood pressure and prevent blood from clotting in the prey animal.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Appendix I of CITES. Listed as vulnerable by the IUCN. Komodos were listed as an endangered species on June 14, 1976 due to their limited range and the small number of wild specimens. They are protected under Indonesian law and the Komodo National Park was founded in 1980 to aid protection efforts. There are thought to be fewer than 6,000 remaining.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Komodo dragons are solitary, coming together only to breed and eat. Males maintain and defend a territory and patrol up to 1.2 miles per day. These lizards maintain burrows within their territorial ranges and occasionally males will swim from island to island over long distances. These lizards regulate their body temperature by using the burrow that they dig for shade in the hottest part of the day. Due to its large size and habit of sleeping in these burrows, the komodo is able to conserve body heat throughout the night and minimize its basking period the morning after.

When hunting, komodo dragons rely on camouflage and patience, by lying in wait for passing prey. When prey approaches, the dragon springs, using its powerful legs, sharp claws and serrated, shark-like teeth to eviscerate prey. They may even stand on their hind legs and use their tail for support. When threatened a komodo may regurgitate food to reduce their weight in order to flee.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Males often fight for breeding rights and may engage in upright combat frequently drawing blood and throwing each other to the ground. Courtship is initiated by the flicking of the male's tongue on the female's snout and then over her body. Mating occurs between May and August with eggs being laid in underground nests in September. Females may guard these nests for a short period immediately after laying. There is no evidence of parental care of newly hatched komodos.

The hatchlings are small and defenseless. Young komodo dragons spend much of their first few years in trees, where they are relatively safe from predators, including any cannibalistic adult komodos; cannibalism is 10 percent of an adult's diet.

Gestation: 9 mos # of Young: 25 eggs	Sexual Maturity: 5 – 7 yrs Weight at birth: 3.5 oz Length at birth: 16 in
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MISCELLANEOUS

Komodo dragons are part of the monitor lizard family and are the largest living species of lizard. In the wild, there are four times as many male dragons as there are females. They are unique among lizards, as they are the top carnivores in their isolated environment. Their eggs are the size of grapefruits. They can eat up to 80% of their body weight in one sitting and they have been seen to eat 5.5 lbs of meat in one minute.

Female Komodo dragons can produce offspring by parthenogenesis when no male is available for sexual reproduction. These offspring produced in this way are all males.

Sources:

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