

RANGE

Found only on the dry, scrub-covered Indonesian Islands of Komodo, Padar, Rinca, and Flores. The largest number are found on Komodo Island.

HABITAT

Throughout the islands, from the rainforest covered hills to lowland tall grasses. At night the lizard is usually found in holes among rocks, caves, or between buttress roots of trees.

SIZE:

Male: Fully grown males average 8–10 feet long. Their heads are square in shape.

Female: Are slightly smaller. Their heads are more triangular shaped.

Weight: 220 to 300 pounds.

LIFE EXPECTANCY

Around 20 years.

REPRODUCTION

- All Komodos are territorial and solitary.
- Males must move in and overpower the females in order to mate.
- About 5 weeks after mating in late June or July, the female lays up to 30 eggs. The number varies according to her size and age (the average clutch is 12 eggs.)
- Eggs are laid in large holes which have been excavated in warm, moist soil.
- Eggs are left unattended to be incubated by the sun. Hatch in about eight months, producing 8 inch long young weighing 3 ounces.
- These young dragons immediately leave the nest and climb up trees to avoid being eaten by almost every predator on the island, including feral cats, dogs and other Komodo Dragons. No one knows for sure how long they remain in the trees, possibly a few years.
- Even after descending from the trees they exhibit what may be a self protective behavior. Young lizards have been observed rubbing their bodies in the hair and intestines of kills, the same parts rejected by adult Komodos.
- They become sexually mature at about 6 years of age

DIET

Wild: Young hatchling dragons eat insects and small lizards. Medium sized dragons eat rats and birds. All begin eating carrion when they reach three feet (approximately 1 year). Large adult dragons eat goats, pigs, deer, and smaller komodo dragons. They have been known to bring down horses and water buffalo.

Zoo: Insects, mice, rats, rabbits, and prepared carnivore diet. Komodos are opportunistic. Their top speed is 11 mph and adults overheat quickly. Rather than pursue prey, Komodos scavenge, lie in ambush in tall grass or shrubs next to trails, or slowly sneak up on their prey. They will attack any animal regardless of size, including humans.

BEHAVIOR

- Komodo Dragons are the main predator on the islands.
- They have poor eyesight and hearing but have a keen sense of smell.
- Komodos smell by flicking their forked tongue like a snake to pick up odors in the air. Scent-laden particles are carried to the Jacobson's organ in the roof of their mouth. They can find injured or dead animals up to 10 miles away and can distinguish the scent of pregnant and non-pregnant prey.
- They slit the ankles of their victims deeply. Blood loss or a fat-moving bacterial infection kill their prey. Komodo saliva is full of deadly bacteria that thrive in the meat caught between their teeth.
- A Komodo will try to gulp down as much food as possible before another dragon comes along and runs it off. They swallow without chewing at the top speed of 5 ½ lbs. a minute
- Komodos hold down food with their heavy legs and slice off huge chunks with their teeth.
- The dragon's can expand their jaws and swallow an entire fawn, a boar's head, or half a goat, in one gulp.



photo: Robert Kemnitz

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

KOMODO DRAGON

CONTINUED

- Dragons will converge on a smelly carcass from miles away. This is often the only time, other than breeding, that the Komodos may be seen together.
- Feeding during such a time is based on the size and aggressiveness of those that meet, with the largest eating first. Smaller dragons have to wait their turn or risk becoming a meal themselves.
- After eating a large meal the dragons will settle down in the brush and may sleep for up to a week while digesting their food. They have slow digestive systems.
- The monitors have exceptional strength but don't always use it. In combat between males, one will dominate, but won't hurt or bite each other. Females, on the other hand, will tear to pieces a male she does not want to breed with.
- A loud exhalation of air means "back off".
- They fall into a deep sleep at sunset.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Komodo Dragons are the world's largest living lizards and the most intelligent. They are able to out think a deer or pig when it comes to hunting.
- Komodos are equipped with large claws and a muscular tail.
- Their curved serrated teeth resemble those of sharks and flesh-eating dinosaurs more than the teeth of today's reptiles.
- Have been seen swimming between the islands in search of prey.
- The Komodo, a meat-eating monitor lizard, was given the name "buaya-buaya" or "Beoayadarat", meaning "Land Crocodile", by the local people.
- For years, western scientists had heard reports of 23 foot land living crocodiles from the indigenous people of the area, but it wasn't until 1912 that the Komodos were "discovered" and brought to the attention of the rest of the world.
- They are known for their ability to swallow a meal almost equal to their own weight at one time. A 101 pound Komodo Dragon was observed completely devouring a 90 pound wild pig. Also a 110 pound dragon consumed a 68 pound pig in 17 minutes.
- Komodo Dragons are not picky eaters and apparently have extremely strong digestive systems since they swallow almost every part of their prey including horns, hooves, even entire porcupines.
- The average 100 pound dragon will only need around 30 pounds of meat per month compared to a large cat or wolf of equal weight which will need around 300 pounds per month.

STATUS

Endangered due to habitat destruction and killing of their prey species by humans. Fewer than 5000 left in the wild. Some reports suggest that as few as 700–1000 still inhabit the island of Komodo.