

## Desert Monitor Lizard (*Varanus griseus*)

The conservation of natural resources is regarded as a high priority in Ras Laffan Industrial City (RLC). Various measures are adopted to protect the wildlife and their habitat such as our mangrove conservation programme, artificial reef placement and protection of sand dunes & salt marshes.

*Varanus griseus* is the most aggressive and the biggest predator in RLC. It can grow up-to 1 m in length, its body only makes up for about one third of its total length, whilst the rest consists of tail. It has a long, forked, snakelike tongue.



***Varanus griseus* leaves distinctive marks on the sand providing vital information on their movement patterns**

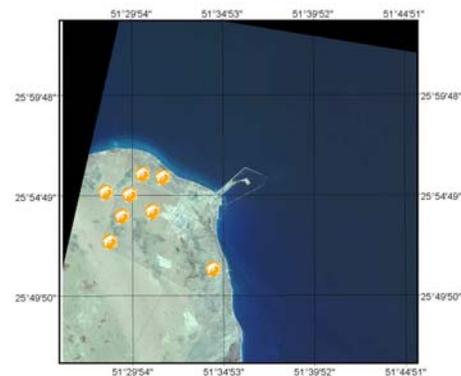
The monitor lizards are brownish-yellow with cross-bands on the body and tail. The nostrils are near the eye, rather than at the tip of the snout. It is carnivorous and feeds on small lizards, snakes, scorpions, rats, bird eggs and other small animals. Their tracks on the Northern beaches of Ras Laffan indicate they also feed on crabs and turtle eggs. It plays an important role in the ecosystem as natural biological control on rodents and reptiles.



***Varanus griseus* is capable of inflicting serious injuries**

Monitor lizards, if handled inappropriately, can inflict serious injuries. These include scratches by their well-developed claws and bites inflicted by their powerful jaws. Monitor bite injuries under certain circumstances require stitches, may result in infections and, under extremely rare circumstances, can result in more serious injuries.

Most people seem to believe that the desert monitor is extremely aggressive, that it can jump to a height of several feet to deliberately bite a man in the face, and that should be killed on sight. These beliefs are unfounded and should be discouraged.



### Distribution of Monitor Lizard's Habitat

*Varanus griseus* breeds in the spring (March-April). After emerging from hibernation it lays

3 to 15 eggs. The number of laid eggs corresponds to the availability of food after emerging from hibernation. Under optimum laboratory conditions it could lay up-to 18 eggs. The clutch is placed under the sand surface, 20 to 30 cm deep, and guarded. The incubation period varies from 8 to 12 weeks, depending on the climatic conditions. The optimum incubation temperature is 30.5 °C.



**A typical burrow dug by Varanus griseus**

Varanus griseus prefers sandy and arid areas with moderate bush coverage. The findings of radio-telemetry surveys suggest that each animal has a large home-range, and may move several kilometres in a day.

In nature its could live up-to 15 years. Most efforts to breed Varanus griseus in captivity have been unsuccessful due to loss of its appetite and requirement for large territory.

Due to the sharp decline in their population, Varanus griseus is classified as an endangered species. It is under threat from the loss of its habitat mainly due to construction of roads and buildings. In addition, lack of awareness is another major factor in reducing their population.



**The most common place of Varanus griseus mortality are roads where it is crushed by vehicles while crossing.**

The measures adopted at Ras Laffan to protect the specie include:

- Identification of burrows location.
- Ensuring long-term protection of burrows.
- Preventing degradation or destruction of habitat.
- Creating awareness among staff and general public.

By being vigilant while driving, especially early in the morning and late in the after noon, and reporting sightings of monitor lizards to RLC Environment Section, we all, as individuals, can contribute in protecting this important and endangered species.

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