



Komodo Dragon

(*Varanus komodoensis*)

The Komodo dragon, scientifically named *Varanus komodoensis*, is known to be the largest lizard in the world. It is only found in the semi-arid Komodo Island (and in some of the Lesser Sunda Islands), 200 nautical miles east of Bali in the Indonesian Archipelago.

The Komodo dragon is the world's largest lizard. The male Komodo dragon could grow up to 9 feet long and weigh about 200 lbs and the female, 8 feet long and 150 lbs. The dragon could live up to 20 years. The species has leathery skin, short legs with large talons, stout body and a very long tail. When young, the komodo has green bands around its body but as it grows older the green bands disappear and the body turns dull grey with occasional spots of red. Its tail is strong enough to crush an opponent. A young species is very adept at climbing trees but as it ages, it tends to stay on the ground. The dragon is an excellent swimmer and fast runner; it can run up to 25 km per hour. Its long, forked tongue can test the air for scents. Its eyes can distinguish movements and colour in good light and its hearing frequency ranges from 400 to 2000 Hz.

A voracious carnivore, the Komodo dragon eats almost any kind of meat. It scavenges carrion to carcasses, and stalks animals - from small rodents to large water buffalo. A young komodo feeds on small gecko, lizards and insects.

The dragon loves being alone. The male and female are only seen together during mating seasons. Every meeting, they perform mating rituals such as tongue touching, nudging of snouts, chin rubbing, neck biting and scratching. Once the male telegraphs its intentions, copulation is over very quickly. A female komodo dragon lays between 20-40 eggs; an egg takes approximately 7-8 months to incubate. Once the eggs



are hatched, young monitors are left to fend for themselves, staying on trees for the first part of their lives.

Adult komodo dragons are at the top of their food chain and have no predator. However, there have been reports that feral dogs and pigs at times eat the dragon's eggs and that birds and even adult Komodo eat young dragon species. Humans are not considered a threat anymore although some persons reportedly shoot dragons that feed on native livestock. Accordingly the komodo dragons have become a tourist attraction of Indonesian islands and so are not hunted.

The Komodo is categorized as vulnerable and many conservationists are concerned about its population. The islands where the dragons live are rich in oil and minerals, which when developed would threaten their only habitat.

By Alona Linatoc, ARCBC Research Branch

