



The **Komodo dragon** (*Varanus komodoensis*) is a species of [lizard](#) found in the [Indonesian](#) islands. It is the largest [extant](#) species of lizard, growing to a maximum length of 3 metres (10 ft) in rare cases and weighing up to approximately 70 kilograms (150 lb). Komodo dragons were first recorded by Western scientists in 1910. Their large size and fearsome reputation make them popular zoo exhibits.

Description

In the wild, adult male Komodo dragons usually weigh up to 90 kg and measure 2.60 m, while an average female will weigh around 70 kg and measure 2.30 m. The Komodo dragon has a tail as long as its body, as well as about 60 frequently replaced, serrated teeth that can measure up to 2.5 cm in length. It also has a long, yellow, deeply [forked tongue](#). Komodo dragon skin is reinforced by armoured scales, which contain tiny bones called [osteoderms](#) that function as a sort of natural [chain-mail](#).



Senses

The Komodo dragon can see objects as far away as 300 m, but, it is thought to have poor night vision. It can distinguish colours, but has poor visual discrimination of stationary objects. As with many other reptiles, the Komodo dragon primarily relies on its tongue to detect, [taste](#), and [smell stimuli](#). With the help of a favourable wind and its habit of swinging its head from side to side as it walks, a Komodo dragon may be able to detect carrion from over 5 km away.

Behaviour

The Komodo dragon prefers hot and dry places, and typically lives in dry, open grassland, savanna, and tropical forest at low elevations. As an [ectotherm](#), it is most active in the day, although it exhibits some [nocturnal](#) activity. Komodo dragons are solitary, coming together only to breed and eat. They are capable of running rapidly in brief sprints up to 12 mph, diving up to 4.5 m, and climbing trees proficiently when young through use of their strong claws. To catch out-of-reach prey, the Komodo dragon may stand on its hind legs and use its tail as a support. As it matures, its claws are used primarily as weapons, as its great size makes climbing impractical. For shelter, the Komodo dragon digs holes that can measure up to 3 m wide with its powerful forelimbs and claws. Because of its large



size and habit of sleeping in these burrows, it is able to conserve body heat throughout the night and minimise its basking period the morning after. The Komodo dragon hunts in the afternoon, but stays in the shade during the hottest part of the day. Young Komodo dragons spend much of their first few years in trees, where they are relatively safe from predators, including cannibalistic adults, as juvenile dragons make up 10% of their diets. Komodo dragons take approximately 8 years to mature, and may live for up to 30 years.

Diet

They are carnivores, although they have been considered as eating mostly carrion, they will frequently ambush live prey with a stealthy approach. When suitable prey arrives near a dragon's ambush site, it will suddenly charge at high speeds and go for the underside or the throat. Komodo dragons do not deliberately allow the prey to escape with fatal injuries, but try to kill outright. Komodo dragons have been observed knocking down large pigs and deer with their strong tails. Komodo dragons eat by tearing large chunks of flesh and swallowing them whole while holding the carcass down with their forelegs. For smaller prey up to the size of a goat, their loosely articulated jaws, flexible skulls, and expandable stomachs allow them to swallow prey whole. Because of their slow metabolism, large dragons can survive on as few as 12 meals a year.

The Komodo dragon's diet is wide-ranging, and includes [invertebrates](#), other reptiles (including smaller Komodo dragons), birds, bird eggs, small mammals, monkeys, wild boar, goats, deer, horses, and [water buffalo](#). Young Komodos will eat insects, eggs, [geckos](#), and small mammals, while adults prefer to hunt large mammals. Occasionally, they attack and bite humans.

Incidents with humans

Attacks on humans are rare, but Komodo dragons have been responsible for several human fatalities, in both the wild and in captivity. In 2007, a Komodo dragon killed an 8-year-old boy on Komodo Island. In 2009, a national park guide stationed on Rinca Island was ambushed and bitten by a Komodo dragon which had walked into his office and lay under his desk. Despite suffering some injuries, the guide survived. In 2017, Lon Lee Alle, a 50-year-old Singaporean tourist was attacked. The victim survived the attack, but his left leg was severely injured.



Komodo dragons generally avoid encounters with humans. Juveniles are very shy and will flee quickly into a hideout if a human comes closer than about 100 metres. Older animals will also retreat from humans from a shorter distance away. If cornered, they may react aggressively by gaping their mouth, hissing, and swinging their tail. If they are disturbed further, they may attack and bite.

In 2019, the total population of Komodo dragons in the wild was assessed as less than 6,000 individuals. On [Padar Island](#), a former population of Komodo dragons has recently become extinct. The species is listed as both endangered and protected.