

# IUCN SSC Monitor Lizard Specialist Group



## 2018 Report



Mark Auliya



André Koch

### Co-Chairs

Mark Auliya (1)  
André Koch (2)

### Red List Authority Coordinator

Daniel Bennett (3)

### Location/Affiliation

(1) Department of Conservation Biology,  
Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research  
GmbH – UFZ, 04318 Leipzig, Germany  
and Zoologisches Forschungsmuseum  
Alexander Koenig, Adenauerallee 160, 53113  
Bonn, Germany  
(2) Zoologisches Forschungsmuseum  
Alexander Koenig, Adenauerallee 160, 53113  
Bonn, Germany  
(3) Box 42793, Larnaca 6503, Cyprus

### Number of members

49

### Social networks

Website:  
<http://varanus.org/>



### Mission statement

Knowledge of the conservation status of monitor lizards (*Varanus* spp.) is essential for the formulation of appropriate conservation measures that would also support the protection of demarcated ecosystems. In gaining this knowledge, it is elementary to work hand in hand with national authorities and local communities.

### Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

By the end of 2020, we wish to have greatly improved networking with Monitor Lizard Specialist Group (MLSG) members to reach the following goals, as a baseline for achieving the resulting impacts:

Goal 1: compile a species reference and image database including information on the distribution of natural history traits, population status and threats of single species. Impact 1: development of more efficient and accurate communication and sharing of current data on the species among group members.

Goal 2: nomination of new members to the group, particularly from range states in Africa and Asia. Impact 2: enrichment of knowledge and refinement of, e.g., national assessments.

Goal 3: continuing investigation of the taxonomic status of several species/species groups with unresolved diversity. Impact 3: establishment of regional species management plans, e.g., based on Evolutionary Significant Units (ESUs).

Goal 4: initiation of field studies, particularly on species from insular Southeast Asia and New Guinea, due to uncertainties regarding population densities and conservation status of wild

populations, in cooperation with local students and scientists. Impact 4: rising public awareness for the species group, and reduction in current uncertainties to improve assessments of the conservation status of *Varanus* species.

Goal 5: establishment of collaborations with scientific/management authorities to improve current management schemes to maintain the viability of species/populations. Impact 5: improvement and implementation of conservation measures together with authorities of range states that harbour *Varanus* species.

Goal 6: based on collaborative projects, the inclusion of non-detriment findings (NDFs) and evaluation of other mechanism tools to assess the threat status of a species, e.g., environmental vulnerability scores and refining population viability analyses (PVAs). Impact 6: see impact 4 (reduction of uncertainties).

### Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

#### Assess

Red List: completion of all assessments and updating earlier assessments (e.g. *Varanus komodoensis*).

Research activities: support research in monitor lizards, especially early-career researchers from range states.

#### Network

Membership: growth of the Specialist Group by invitation of new members.

Scientific meetings: organisation of the Second MLSG Meeting.

#### Communicate

Communication: (1) production of an identification guide for customs and authorities of all monitor lizard species involved in the pet and leather trade; (2) provide essential information about all monitor lizard species via our homepage.



Confiscated genitalia (called hemipenis) of a Bengal monitor (*Varanus bengalensis*), which are illegally offered in India (and online) as alleged plant roots called Hatha Jodi  
Photo: Thomas Ziegler



Technical advice: (1) support CITES authorities, customs officers and other organisations entrusted with law enforcement and conservation of monitor lizards worldwide by providing expert knowledge from our Specialist Group.

## Activities and results 2018

### Assess

#### Red List

i. Of 81 recognised species, currently 53 have been assessed and reviewed by several MLSG members. (KSR #1)

#### Research activities

i. We commented on and improved a proposal for an application by a Dutch-Indonesian student to the National Geographic early career grant, with the aim to prepare a PhD project with exploratory trips to New Guinea to evaluate the conservation status of *Varanus macraei*, which is a target-species of the international pet trade. We also wrote an endorsement letter for our MLSG member K.M. Mijanur Rahman for a project on *Varanus* spp. from Bangladesh for a National Geographic Society Request for Proposals (RFP) grant. (KSR #12)

### Network

#### Membership

i. Invitation of further members to the Monitor Lizard Specialist Group from range states of varanid lizards, i.e., Benin, India, Australia, and non-range states, such as Austria and Spain.

### Scientific meetings

i. A second MLSG meeting to be held in Indonesia was discussed at the inaugural meeting in 2015; however, in December 2016 we were advised to have the meeting in another location due to administrative/bureaucratic constraints. Alternatively, Sri Lanka was proposed, but this plan was not in favour of all members.

### Communicate

#### Communication

i. The Federal Agency for Nature Conservation in Germany finally launched the project to compile an Identification Guide of all monitor lizard species involved in the pet and leather trade for customs, enforcement officers and stakeholders; this project is carried out by the two Co-Chairs. (KSR #28)

ii. We amended and improved the MLSG website. (KSR #28)

#### Technical advice

i. We provided information on availability and breeding success of *Varanus kingorum* for the local German CITES authority in Hannover. In addition, we provided expert knowledge on *V. exanthemicus* and *V. timorensis* for the 30th CITES Animals Committee meeting on behalf of IUCN, answered a request to distinguish and identify *Varanus* skins from iguanid skins by Dutch CITES authorities, and identified three illegally imported Philippine *Varanus* spp. on behalf of the airport customs in Dresden, Germany. We were asked by IUCN for our opinion on the taxonomic validity of two recently described and revalidated monitor lizard species, viz. *V. semotus* and *V. dourha*. Moreover, we provided

a critical review of a document entitled “Welfare Principles for Reptiles in Trade - A guide for Stakeholders”, that was not approved, and contributed information and photos of monitor lizards to a blog on illegal wildlife trade (<http://preview.shorthand.com/VFcXsYFOaV9a8LxE>) on the occasion of the Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference in London (<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/london-conference-on-the-illegal-wildlife-trade-2018>). (KSR #26)

### Acknowledgements

At this stage, we thank the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation in Germany, which recognised the need to produce an Identification Guide of all *Varanus* spp., a reptile group that is highly sought after within the international commercial trade.

### Summary of activities 2018

Species Conservation Cycle ratio: 3/5

|             |   |  |
|-------------|---|--|
| Assess      | 2 |  |
| Network     | 2 |  |
| Communicate | 3 |  |

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 12, 26, 28

KSR: Key Species Result