

# Komodo Dragon

by KASEY



**COMMON NAME:** KOMODO DRAGON

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** VARANUA KOMODOENSIS

**HABITAT:** THE KOMODO DRAGON LIVES ON A FEW SMALL ISLANDS IN INDONESIA WHICH ARE: KOMODO, PADAR, RINTJA, OEWADA SAMI, GILI MOTO & PARTS OF FLORES

**SIZE:** KOMODO DRAGONS CAN GET UP TO 10 FEET IN LENGTH AND WEIGH ABOUT 300 POUNDS.

**FOOD:** THE KOMODO DRAGON IS CARNIVOROUS AND EATS ANYTHING THEY CAN OVERPOWER. SMALLER KOMODOS HAVE TO BE CONTENT WITH EGGS, LIZARDS, SNAKES AND RODENTS. LARGE KOMODOS HUNT DEER, WILD PIGS, WATER BUFFALOS, AND EVEN HORSES.

The female Komodo dragons lay about 20 to 25 soft, leathery eggs in September. The eggs are about twice the size of a chicken egg, weighing in at about 125g. The eggs incubate for about 8 - 9 months during the wet season. About a quarter to a fifth of each clutch fails to hatch. Wild boar or other Komodos may eat whole clutches. Although parental care after egg-laying is minimal or non-existent, in some cases it appears that the female is guarding the nest site prior

to egg-laying, protecting it from other females. While some females lay the whole clutch of eggs over a few hours, others are more sporadic and can take several weeks. This nest guarding behavior could be associated with the slower egg laying. Komodo hatchlings are on average about 30 - 40 cm long and weigh about 100 grams at birth. They spend their first year in trees. Unlike the mud-colored adults, hatchlings are marked with yellow spots and lines which camouflage them on bark and among branches. They have a long, thin body and a proportionally longer tail than in adults, an adaptation to living in trees. Living in trees not only keeps them from predators like adult Komodos, which are too heavy to climb trees, but it also avoids competing for the same scarce food resources as adults. Babies start with insects and small reptiles, graduating to small mammals and birds as juveniles. In about a year, they reach about 1m long and then live permanently on the ground. They reach maturity at about 5 years, by which time they can weigh 25kg and reach 2m long.

Komodo Dragons are becoming extinct because people kill what the komodo eats and because people are killing the komodo dragons. Because there are fewer prey and smaller living spaces, Komodos turn to livestock or even kill humans. Villagers retaliate by poisoning or shooting Komodos. Komodos are also sometimes poached for the pet trade.

## 10 FACTS

1. According to one website, it states that the Komodo dragon lives 20-40 years, however, another website states that the komodo lives as long as 100 years.
2. They have a large yellow forked tongue and drop their lower jaw like a snake.
3. Reptiles have a much lower energy requirement than mammals, especially in harsh weather. Because of this, they have the advantage as the top predator.
4. The Komodo dragon has different names. How they got these names are:
  1. Komodo Monitor - monitor means lizard and from the island of Komodo
  2. Ora - a name just for these specific animals
  3. Penduga - a very old Ora; Grandfather Ora
  4. Buaja Darat - native people call the Komodo dragon this name because it means "Land Crocodile."
5. The Komodo dragons are not directly descended from dinosaurs. Komodo dragon's exact evolution is still unsure but it is thought to be descended from the 7m long Giant Goanna (*Megania prisca*). Scientific reconstruction shows the Giant Goanna to be very similar to the komodos, but 10 times as heavy. These giant reptiles died out about 10,000-25,000 years ago. The Komodo dragon probably emerged from early members of the Giant Goanna during the ice age period, about 4 to 5 million years ago.
6. To survive in the harsh environment, like all reptiles, Komodo dragons heat up their body by basking in the sun and cool it down in shade or on moist surfaces.
7. Why are the dragons only found on their remote island? Because it is possible that the Komodo Islands were joined to their eastern neighbors about 20,000 years ago due to global changes in sea levels due to the Pleistocene Ice Age.
8. Even though Komodos are large and seem slow, they can move with alarming speed when they want to. They can lunge from their hiding places and sprint toward their victims. They can not last long in their chases, but all they need to do is bite one time. Komodos carry poisonous bacteria in their mouth so even if they don't catch their prey, the attack is often fatal.
9. Komodos devour every bit of their prey including bones, fur and hooves. They rip off huge chunks with their razor-sharp serrated teeth swallowing in whole pieces.
10. Komodos caught in the wild don't survive well in captivity. They don't reproduce readily and often die from infections and parasitic diseases some young born in the zoo, do well.