

## Roger's Aquatics & Pet Supplies: Chinese Water Dragons

*Physignathus cocincinus* is an impressive species of lizard from Thailand, southern China, Vietnam, and Cambodia. With some work they can become tame and be handled. Occasional hand feeding can really help with this and will build trust with the lizard. They are a fair sized lizard, with males reaching 3 feet and females reaching 2 feet. Under proper care, they can live 10 – 12 years, although 15 years is not unheard of. These lizards are diurnal, meaning they enjoy being out during the day.

### Enclosure: Size, Substrate, and Accessories

Water dragons need a much larger enclosure than their size would suggest. For a single adult dragon, a minimum of 4 – 6 feet tall by 6 feet long by 2 – 3 feet wide should be provided. The more height that can be provided, the better. Baby dragons can be started in a 40 gallon breeder (36" long by 18" wide by 18" tall) but will need to be upgraded quickly. For multiple dragons, and even larger enclosure is recommended. Since water dragons are prone to rubbing their snouts on the glass, the back and sides of the tank should be blocked off to minimize the chances of them rubbing as much as possible.

Coco coir be used as a substrate. It will help hold in humidity and if the dragon falls while exploring the tank, they won't hurt themselves on it. A top layer of moss and leaf litter can be added to help raise the humidity. It is important to note that there is a risk of impaction with any animal that is being housed on loose substrate. Typically, impaction only occurs to animals that are dehydrated, not receiving adequate lighting or diet, or in some other way are unhealthy, and it is much rarer than people think, but if you choose to keep your animal on loose substrate you should familiarize yourself with the signs of impaction and see what local vets deal with reptiles. The substrate should be changed out every 3 – 4 months since it will hold bacteria.

Chinese water dragons will thrive in an arboreal, tree top canopy environment. Thick foliage and sturdy branches that are large enough to support the entire dragon's body should be provided. The branches should have little to no cracks in them so that their nails don't get caught while they are climbing. One of the branches needs to be a basking spot, and should get within 6 inches of the UVB source. Cork flats and rounds may also be provided, as well as hammocks. Caves are not necessary. A large water area should also be provided (more information in Hydration and Humidity).

### Lighting and Heat

A basking area of 90 – 95 F should be provided, with a cold area of 84 – 88 F. This can be achieved using a daylight basking bulb, a mercury vapour bulb (MVB), or a ceramic heat emitter. At night, they can drop comfortably to 75 – 80 F. If needed, a ceramic heat emitter can be used. A proper thermometer should always be used to measure the temperature. Too hot, and the animal could overheat. Too cold, and they won't grow properly or won't digest properly. Digital is preferred, since it is more accurate.

A 5.0 UVB bulb should be provided, unless a MVB bulb is being used since they also put on UVB. The light should be on for 12 hours a day. This type of lighting is essential in maintaining proper vitamin D3 levels, which allows them to properly absorb and metabolize calcium, regulates the immune system, and promotes proper organ development. Since these lights are aren't quite the same as the sun, providing a calcium with added D3 once a week is beneficial. UVB lights (and MVB) should be replaced every 6 – 12 months.

## Diet and Supplements

Water dragons will accept crickets, mealworms, king worms, wax worms, earth worms, butter worms, horn worms, phoenix worms, feeder fish, and once they're big enough, pinky mice. Butter worms, horn worms, and wax worms should be fed as treats only. Pinky mice can be offered every few months since they're quite fatty. Small amounts of fruits and veggies (about 10 – 15% of the dragon's diet) can be offered once a week. Carrots, squash, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, bananas, mango, papaya, fig, and cantaloupe are all acceptable. It's important to vary their diet to make sure the dragon is getting a variety of nutrients and to make sure they don't get bored eating the same thing. All feeder insects should be gut loaded 1 – 24 hours before being fed. Feeders should be dusted with calcium without D3 every other feeding, and with multivitamins once a week. It can be beneficial to supplement with calcium with D3 every once in a while as well. Babies should be fed daily, and adults 3 times a week.

## Hydration and Humidity

The humidity should be maintained between 60 – 80%. Misting the enclosure 1 – 2 times a day will help maintain this. A proper hygrometer should always be used to measure the humidity levels. Digital is preferred, since it's more accurate. A swimming area should be provided, and should be large enough for whatever size dragon is being housed. The general rule is that the minimum depth of the pool should be 1/2 their height. Rocks can be placed in the swimming area for them to sit in. If a water dish is being used, it should be cleaned daily. Larger pond style swimming areas can have a filter added on to help keep it clean. With a filter, water changes can be done every 2 – 3 days or as needed. The filter should be cleaned according to package instructions. Always take a picture of the filter model or bring in the old media to get an exact match when replacing.

## Cohabitation

Typically it is better in most cases to house the water dragons alone. Males will fight, and females can sometimes be territorial. If these dragons are going to be housed together, groups of one male to two or three females is best. A much larger enclosure will need to be provided. Separate housing should always be ready to go in case there are fights. There is a chance that the dragons will breed, and proper steps should be taken to make sure the female is properly taken care of in this event. Additionally, if one gets sick, the other is pretty much guaranteed to get sick as well, costing you double the vet bills, double the meds, and causing double the stress.

## Sexing

Males have more developed nuchal crests above the neck, and prominent mid sagittal crests, Males also have larger heads, jowls, and larger femoral pores. Typically males are larger, reaching 3 feet while females typically only reach 2 feet.

## Checklist of Supplies

- |   |                                 |                   |
|---|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| ✓ 4 – 6 feet tall by 6 feet long by 2 – 3 feet wide enclosure | ✓ Foliage + Branches            | ✓ Multivitamins   |
| ✓ Background to prevent nose rubbing                          | ✓ Swimming area                 | ✓ Thermometer     |
| ✓ Coco coir   | ✓ Mister (automatic or regular) | ✓ Hygrometer      |
|   | ✓ Calcium (with/without D3)     | ✓ Insect keeper   |
|   |                                 | ✓ Insect diet     |
|   |                                 | ✓ Insect gut load |