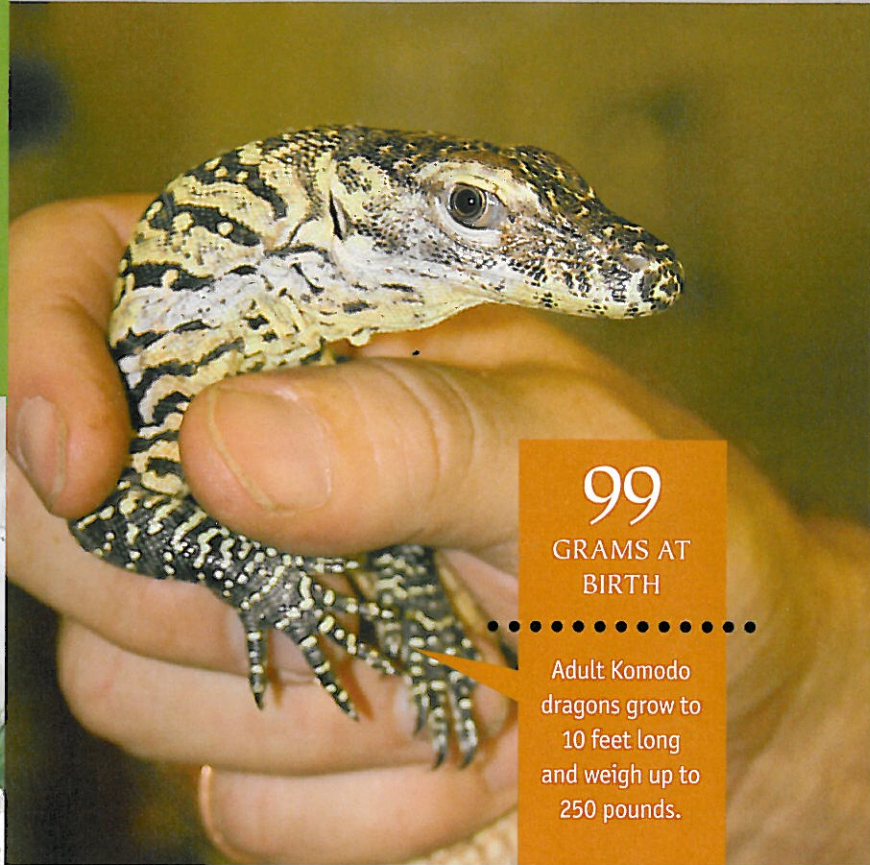


## Conservation

*The*

# Komodo Dragon

## Program



99

GRAMS AT  
BIRTH

Adult Komodo dragons grow to 10 feet long and weigh up to 250 pounds.

by Tiffany Langston, Communications Specialist

The Memphis Zoo has housed Komodo dragons since the Dragon's Lair exhibit opened in July 1998. Komodo dragons are native to Indonesia and are the world's largest species of lizard. Adults can grow to be more than 10 feet long, weigh up to 250 pounds and can live up to 30 years in the wild.

These reptiles are vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. There are currently 4,000 to 5,000 dragons in the wild. They suffer from loss of habitat due to fires, earthquakes and volcanic activity, and loss of prey due to illegal poaching.

The Memphis Zoo's Komodo dragon exhibit is currently the home of three adult Komodo dragons: one female, "Norberta" and two males, "Jeff" and "Voltron."

For more than a decade, our staff has been working tirelessly to foster a Komodo dragon breeding program. Zookeepers welcomed the Memphis Zoo's first baby Komodo dragon on October 8, 2011. The baby was born after 222 days of incubation and weighed approximately 99 grams at birth.

Norberta laid a clutch, or group, of eggs in late February. Out of eight specimens, only one egg was fertile. The paternity of the baby dragon is a bit of a mystery, as Norberta spent time with both males prior to laying her eggs. It is also possible for female Komodo dragons to produce eggs that develop without

fertilization through a process known as parthenogenesis. There are several documented cases of this form of reproduction in captive dragons.

The paternity, as well as the sex, of the baby Komodo dragon will be determined by DNA testing within the next few months. Zookeepers are waiting to name the baby until it is determined whether the hatchling is male or female.

The baby will remain at the Memphis Zoo for the next couple of years until it reaches three to four feet in length. The Zoo will then

work with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums to find a home. Zoo staff are currently renovating space in the Herpetarium and visitors can expect to see the Komodo dragon baby on exhibit by early spring. ■■

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