

Background Information

What Is a Reptile?

These creepy critters come in so many shapes and sizes, it may be difficult to understand why scientists group a snake and a turtle together. Here are the minimum requirements for entry into the reptile club:

BACKBONE — All reptiles are *vertebrates*, which means they have a central spine that supports a skeleton.

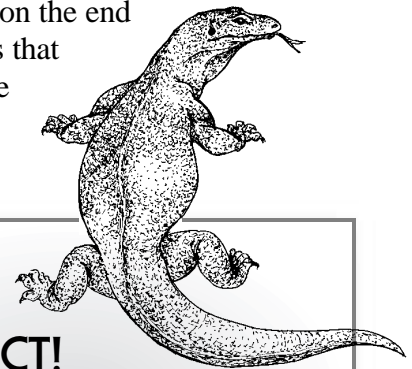
SCALES — All reptiles have scales (or plates, in the case of turtles) that prevent them from losing moisture through their skin. That's why many reptiles thrive in deserts, where few other forms of life can survive. Scales are made mostly of *keratin*—a material that's found in our fingernails and toenails. This armor also helps protect reptiles from injury.

COLD-BLOODED BODY — Reptiles, as well as amphibians and fish, are *cold-blooded*. That means their body temperature changes with the outside temperature. (Mammals are *warm-blooded*—they maintain constant body temperatures.)

When exposed to temperature extremes, reptiles have ways to keep from freezing or overheating. For example, they burrow under the ground to escape both sun and cold, or sunbathe to warm up.

LUNGS — All reptiles, even sea snakes, breathe air through lungs.

EGGS — Except for a few types of snakes and lizards, most reptiles lay eggs. Unlike aquatic reptiles, land-dwelling reptiles lay eggs with hard shells to keep the embryo from drying out. Baby snakes and lizards come equipped with a sharp egg tooth to break through their shells. Crocodiles and tortoises have a horny knob on the end of their snouts that serve the same purpose.



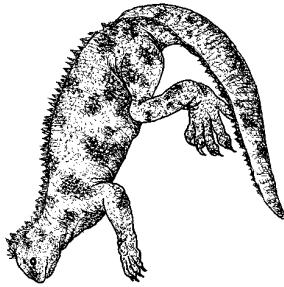
IT'S A FACT!

For warm-blooded animals, holding a constant body temperature requires a lot of food for energy. Cold-blooded reptiles, on the other hand, can go without eating for weeks or even months!

Reptile Fact Cards

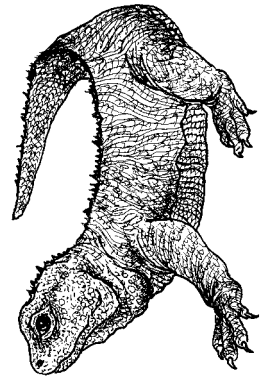
Marine Iguana

This reptile is the only lizard that lives in the sea.



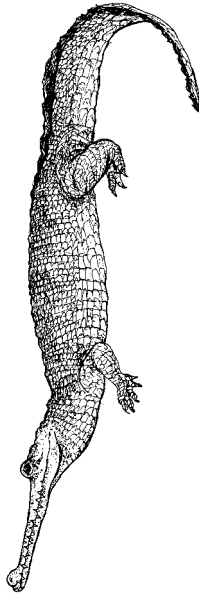
Tuatara

This one-of-a-kind reptile can live up to 120 years.



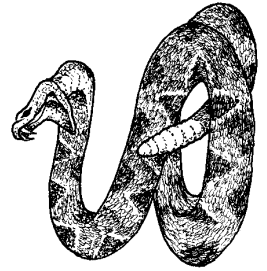
Gharial

This crocodile swallows stones to help digest, or break down, its food.



Rattlesnake

This snake doesn't lay eggs. It gives birth to live young.



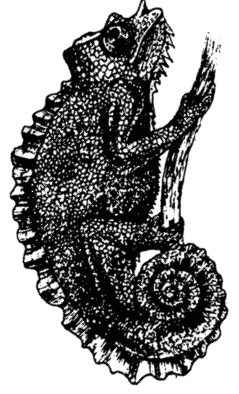
Matamora

This turtle doesn't bite or chew. It sucks up its meals.



Chameleon

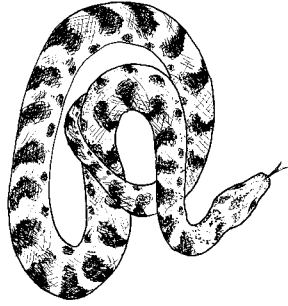
This lizard can look in two directions at the same time.



Reptile Fact Cards

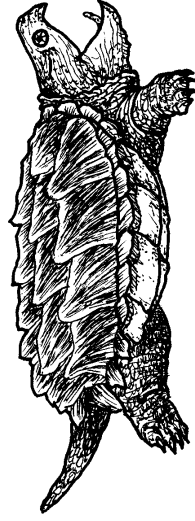
Anaconda

This giant snake spends most of its time in water.



Alligator Snapping Turtle

This turtle has a very large head with a strong beak.



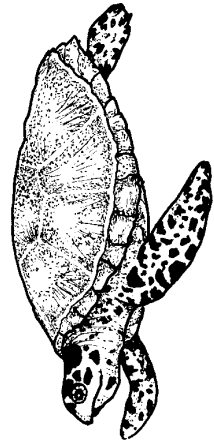
Komodo Dragon

This giant lizard eats deer, wild pigs, and other Komodo dragons.



Leatherback Turtle

This sea turtle likes to eat jellyfish and crabs.



Saltwater Crocodile

This crocodile can grow up to 23 feet long!



Giant Tortoise

This slow turtle would take a whole morning to cross a football field.

