

# Lizards

## Discussion Questions:



- 1) How many different species of lizards live in the world?
- 2) What types of environments do lizards inhabit?
- 3) How do some lizards walk up walls without falling?
- 4) How do lizards protect themselves against predators?
- 5) Are there any dangerous lizards in the world?

## Autonomy: A Defence Mechanism

Many lizards have the ability to throw off their tail and regrow a new one. They do this when they are threatened by a predator.

When its tail detaches, the nerve endings make it continue to move, flipping around on the ground. This distracts the predator, giving the lizard time to get away unharmed.

Although the original tail had bones, the new tail forms from cartilage. The new tail is often not as colourful as the original tail.



Like many other reptiles, lizards shed the outer layer of skin periodically to reveal new skin underneath. The outer layer of skin usually comes away in pieces. Lizards shed their skins more frequently in their youth to accommodate their growth.



# Skinks

Skinks are lizards that have short bodies with short legs. Different species range in size. Some have long tails that can be thrown off to confuse predators when the animal is in danger. The tail eventually grows back.



# Chameleons

There are about 180 different species of chameleons in the world. They range in colour and some are even able to change colours to blend into their environment! Their eyes are able to work independently, which means they can look in two different directions at once. This is very handy for watching out for predators and for spotting insects to eat! Some chameleons also have a curly tail that they can use to hold onto branches, like a monkey does. They also have an extremely long tongue that they can shoot out at lightning speed to catch their prey.



# Legless Lizards

There are many families of lizards that are limbless or have limbs that are so small that they are not noticeable. These types of lizards are generally defined as *legless lizards*.

They look like snakes but they have features that distinguish them as being lizards:  
They have eyelids, snakes do not.  
They have external earholes, snakes do not.  
They have a notched tongue, snakes have a forked tongue.

There are over 200 different species of legless lizards in the world and they are found on every continent except Antarctica. They are also known as slow worms or glass lizards in parts of Europe.

In Australia there are 40 different species of legless lizards. They are harmless creatures but many people fear them, mistaking them for snakes.



# Geckos

There are many species of geckos. Most are nocturnal and have excellent night vision. They have developed an amazing ability to walk up vertical surfaces due to the structure of their toe pads. The rows of skin under their toes act like suction caps, allowing the gecko to cling to a variety of surfaces.



Geckos do not have eyelids. They cannot blink to keep their eyes moist so they lick their eyes periodically with their tongue!

Many geckos use camouflage for protection. They range in colour, from speckled brown and grey for blending in with leaf litter and tree trunks to bright green for blending in with plant foliage.

# Monitors

Monitor lizards are the largest species of lizards. The fearsome komodo dragon, which lives on some islands of Indonesia, and the Australian goanna are examples of monitor lizards.

They are fast moving powerful predators with long powerful tails and strong claws. They hunt for animals smaller than themselves but have been known to eat fruit and eggs, depending on food availability.





# Iguanas

There are two species of iguana, one of which is endangered.

The *Lesser Antillian Iguana* are inhabitants of some of the Island nations in the Caribbean Sea, such as Dominica, Martinique and Guadeloupe. The population of this species has greatly reduced due to land clearing and illegal hunting.

The *green iguana* is the more common species. These animals can be found in the equatorial rainforests of Central America, ranging from Mexico to Brazil and the Caribbean Islands. They can range in colour from bright green, blue and red to various shades of brown and black. (See pictures right.)

Iguanas are large lizards, averaging a length of around 2 metres (6.5 feet). They have a row of spines down the middle of their back and a dewlap under their chin. (A dewlap is a flap of skin.) They have powerful tails that they can use to defend themselves. Like many other types of lizards, iguanas are able to lose their tails and grow another one.

