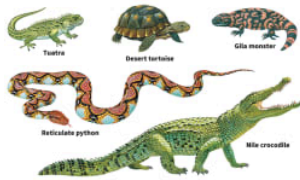




Reptile



Reptiles



Reptiles are a major group of animals with dry, scaly skin. There are thousands of kinds of reptiles. They include lizards, snakes, turtles, alligators, crocodiles, and *tuataras* <<TOO uh TAH ruh>>. The dinosaurs were reptiles that lived more than 65 million years ago.



What's the difference between a reptile and an amphibian?

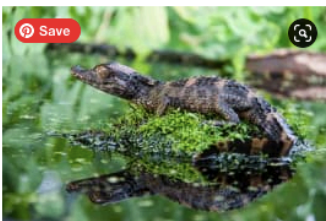
Reptiles are *cold-blooded* animals. This means that their body temperature changes with the temperature around them. Reptiles usually control their body temperature through behavior. For example, reptiles that are active during the day move between sunny spots and shady areas. Reptiles that live in hot regions often hide during the day and are active only at night. Reptiles that live in places with cold winters usually *hibernate*. They remain in a long state of inactivity during the coldest months.



Crocodile



Most reptiles eat other animals. They prey on almost any creature they can catch. Many reptiles eat mainly insects. Others may feed on rodents, birds, or other small animals. A few reptiles eat mainly plants. These reptiles include several kinds of lizards and turtles. Reptiles usually grab their food quickly. They then either chew it or swallow it whole. Reptiles can go without food for long periods. After a large meal, for example, a snake may not feed again for weeks or even months. Reptiles are eaten by certain birds and mammals, as well as other reptiles.



Smooth-fronted dwarf caiman

Reptiles live in deserts, forests, grasslands, lakes, rivers, and other places. They are found on every continent except Antarctica. They live in all the oceans except the polar ones.





Tuatara

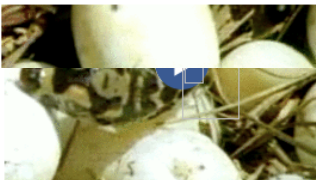


Lizards and snakes make up the largest group of reptiles. Most lizards have four legs and long tails. Snakes have no legs.



Gecko sheds its skin

Turtles make up another group of reptiles. They are the only reptiles with shells. Most turtles can pull their head, legs, and tail into the shell for protection.



Alligator hatching



Alligators, crocodiles, and their relatives make up another group of reptiles. All of them live in or near water. They have long snouts, powerful jaws, and webbed back feet. They use their long tails to swim.

The other group of reptiles is made up of tuataras. Tuataras are native to several islands off the coast of New Zealand. They look like lizards, but they belong to a different group of reptiles. These reptiles were once much more common than they are today.

Many reptiles regularly *molt* (shed their skin) as they grow. The skin loosens after new scales form under it. The old skin splits open. It is abandoned or sometimes eaten. The new skin is soft at first, but it soon hardens.

Most reptiles hatch from eggs. The females lay eggs in rotting wood, a nest of leaves and moist soil, or elsewhere on land. Most reptiles do not provide care for their eggs or young.

