

Reptiles

Classification and Features



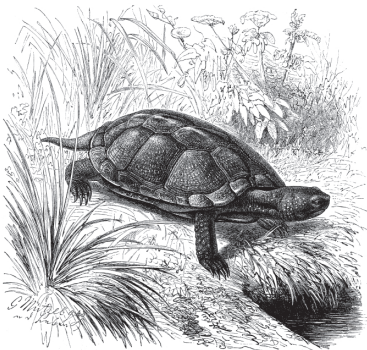
Study*ladder*

REPTILES

- Have scales or scutes.
- Have dry skin.
- Usually lay eggs.
- Are ectothermic (cold-blooded)

TURTLES

Includes:
turtles, sea turtles,
tortoises, terrapins



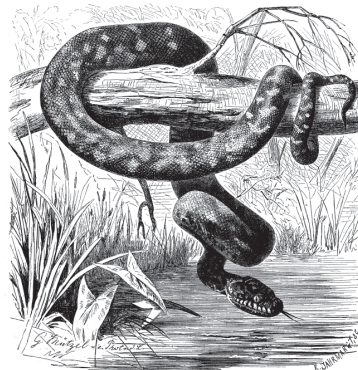
CROCODILES

Includes:
crocodiles, alligators,
caimans, gharial



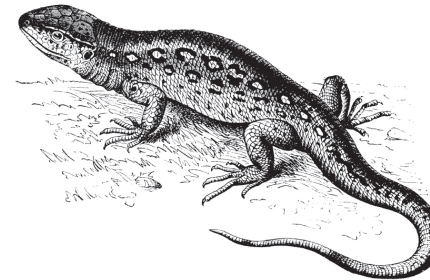
SNAKES

Includes:
terrestrial snakes, sea
snakes



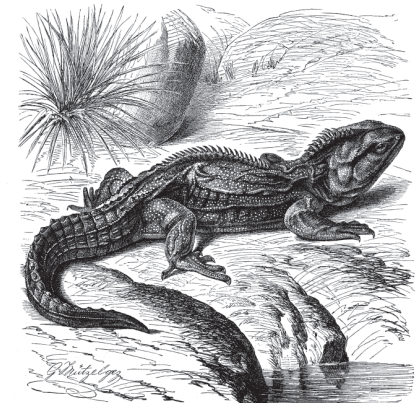
LIZARDS

Includes:
legless lizards, skinks,
geckos, monitors and
many others



TUATARA

Very rare lizard found
only in the islands
surrounding New
Zealand



Scales or Scutes?

Many reptiles have a layer of overlapping scales which provide protection against UV rays and prevents moisture loss. The scales are made of a protein called keratin.

Some reptiles have much thicker plates of keratin, called scutes, that create a tough armour-like skin. Crocodiles and alligators have thick bumpy scutes over the surface of their skin.

Some scutes form a bony horn-like surface, like the tough, bony scutes on the shell of turtles and tortoises. Scutes provide good protection against the elements and predators.





Shedding Skin

Many reptiles shed the outer layer of skin periodically to reveal new skin underneath. The outer layer of skin usually comes away in pieces. However some reptiles such as snakes may shed their whole skin in one piece.

Reptiles shed their skins more frequently in their youth to accommodate their growth. You can see rings of growth on tortoise shell scutes.



Cold- Blooded Animals

Mammals and birds are endothermic, which means they produce heat within their bodies. Circulation of warm blood keeps their bodies at an optimum temperature, regardless of how hot or cold their environment may be.

Reptiles, however, are ectothermic. This means that they rely on external sources of heat such as sunlight to regulate their body temperature. They are cold-blooded and will absorb heat by lying in direct sunlight or on a heated surface like a hot rock. When they need to cool down they will move into the shade or dig down into cooler layers of soil.

Cold blooded animals that live in areas with extreme seasonal fluctuations in temperature may seek shelter in burrows and hibernate to avoid stress on their bodies.



Laying Eggs

Most reptiles lay eggs. Crocodile and tortoise eggs have hard shells but most lizard, snake and turtle eggs have soft leathery shells.

Some species of reptiles retain their eggs in the mother's body and give birth to live babies when they are ready to hatch.

Female reptiles often build a nest to lay their eggs in. Sometimes they bury their eggs to protect them while they incubate.

Some reptile mothers leave the nest once they have laid their eggs. Others stay and care for their young once they have hatched. Some crocodiles and alligators, for example, are ferociously protective of their young and will carry their newly hatched young to the water in their mouths or on top of their heads.

Some reptiles return to the same breeding ground every year.





Crocodiles hatch from eggs that are laid in nests dug into the river bank. The eggs incubate for about 2 months before hatching. The parent usually guards the nest until the babies hatch. They are far more aggressive and territorial during the breeding season. Some parents help the babies get to water.