

INTRODUCTION TO REPTILES

All Reptiles are **vertebrates**. They are found throughout the warmer parts of the world and they thrive in numerous habitats from open sea, deserts, rainforest and even underground. Snakes, lizards, crocodiles, turtles and tortoises are all reptiles.



KEEPING WARM

Snakes and lizards are **ectothermic** this means they rely on their environment to satisfy heat requirements and can often be seen basking in the sun to warm up. **Mammals** like us can generate heat internally and can regulate our own temperature using food as a fuel. Unlike mammals, reptiles cannot sweat to cool down and need to escape into the shade to avoid fatally high temperatures.

SKIN

Reptile skin is effectively watertight because it is covered

in protective **scales**. In some species, like tortoises and turtles, these scales have become enlarged, and along with flattened and fused vertebrae, form the shell.

Scales are formed from an outer layer of dead skin and in order for the lizard, snake or turtle to grow this outer surface must be periodically shed or **sloughed**. Although the skin of reptiles may be shiny it is never slimy to touch.



DIET

All snakes are **predators** and will eat a variety of prey including mammals, birds, fish and insects. All snakes swallow their food whole.

Lizards also eat a variety of foods. Some are **herbivores**, eating only plants and fruit. Many are **omnivores**, eating a mixture of both plant and animal matter, A number of species are insectivores and eat only insects.

LIFE CYCLE

All tortoises and turtles and the majority of lizards and snakes lay eggs. Reptile young always hatch or are born as miniature replicas of their parents – no metamorphic change takes place.



SKELETON / ANATOMY

Snakes never have ears but lizards always do, even though you cannot always see the ear opening. Snakes feel sound through vibrations. All reptiles have a skeleton.



Snake skeleton

Glossary

Ectothermic Being reliant on external heat sources to maintain body temperature.

Herbivore Any animal that feeds only on plant matter.

Omnivore Any animal that feeds upon both plants and animals.

Sloughed Any outer covering that is shed, such as the skin of a snake.

Predator An animal that hunts and eats other creatures.

Mammal Any animal that has hair and feeds its babies on its own milk.

Vertebrate An animal with a bony skeleton - all amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

Scales Thin piece of skin or bone that covers the outside of some animals.