

Reptiles

This text is adapted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

Reptiles are cold-blooded animals that have backbones. They live both on land and in water like amphibians. Reptiles have lungs from the time they are born, not gills, like amphibians.

Reptiles also lay eggs. Some reptile eggs have soft shells and some have hard shells. They lay their eggs on land. A few snakes hold the eggs inside their bodies until they hatch. Very few rare reptiles do give birth to live young, never making real eggs.

Many different groups of animals are classified as reptiles. These include animals such as crocodiles, alligators, turtles, tortoises, snakes, and lizards.



Crocodiles, turtles, snakes, and lizards are all reptiles.

Some people may think reptiles, mainly snakes, are scary. Most reptiles will not harm people. But there are some reptiles that you should try to avoid. The black mamba is the best example. This is the longest and most poisonous snake in Africa. It is also the deadliest snake in the world. A mamba injects venom whenever it bites something. A mamba bite can kill any animal-even a human-in less than 20 minutes!



A poisonous black mamba snake

Rattlesnakes, copperheads, and water moccasins are types of poisonous snakes found in the United States. Rattlesnakes, or rattlers, are easy to spot because they have "rattles" that shake on their tails. You know when there is one nearby because you can hear the rattles shaking.

Copperheads have a triangle-shaped head and dark stripes. They are normally less than three feet long. They prefer to live in rocky, wooded areas. They only bite humans if they are attacked or startled.

Water moccasins live in the water so they are hard to spot. They have a dangerous bite, but rarely attack humans. If you live in a southern state like Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, or Louisiana, you are more likely to see one. They live in swamps or shallow lakes. You might want to avoid swimming in shallow waters if you live in those states.



Some people think snakes are slimy because their skin looks shiny, but most reptiles have thick, dry, scaly skin. Reptiles are known for molting, or shedding their skin. Reptiles shed their skin several times during their lives. Snakes, for example, shed their skin in one big piece. They do this when they grow too big for their current skin.



This snakeskin has been left behind by a large snake after it molted.

The biggest reptile is the saltwater crocodile, which lives mainly in Australia and a few parts of India and Asia. Male saltwater crocodiles can grow to be 20 feet long or more! Attacks on humans are rare. If they do attack a human, it's usually not a happy ending.

Crocodiles have the most powerful bite in the entire animal kingdom. Their bites are ten times stronger than that of a great white shark. Despite their power when they bite and snap their jaws shut, it is fairly easy to hold a crocodile's mouth closed. They open their mouths using a weak set of muscles.



Crocodiles have powerful jaws and a mean bite.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is one thing that all reptiles do?

2. The text describes different kinds of snakes. Select one snake from the article and describe it. Use at least two details in your description.

3. Crocodiles are reptiles. Based on this knowledge, what is one inference you can make about crocodiles?

4. What is a main idea of this text?
