

Lizard Facts

Lizards are one of the biggest, most diverse and widespread groups of reptiles found on Earth. They are found on all continents, except Antarctica.

- Lizard (suborder Sauria) refer to any of the more than 5,500 species of reptiles belonging in the order Squamata (which also includes snakes). They feature in a wide variety of colors, appearance, and size.
- It comprises 40 different families. According to the San Diego Zoo, there are currently over 4,675 lizard species, including iguanas, chameleons, geckos, Gila monsters, monitors, and skinks. Their ancestors appeared on Earth over 200 million years ago.
- Lizards are scaly-skinned reptiles that are usually distinguished from snakes by the possession of legs, movable eyelids, and external ear openings. However, some traditional (that is, non-snake) lizards lack one or more of these features.
- Due to their smooth and shiny appearance, some lizards can appear slimy or slippery. However, their skin – like all reptiles – is actually very dry due to a lack of pores to excrete water and oils.

Class: Reptilia

Higher classification: Scaled reptiles

Kingdom: Animalia

Order: Squamata

Phylum: Chordata



Lizard Facts



MOBILITY

All lizards are capable of swimming, and a few are quite comfortable in aquatic environments. Many are also good climbers and fast sprinters. Some can even run on two legs, such as the Collared Lizard and the Spiny-Tailed Iguana.

LIZARDS AND HUMANS

Most lizard species are harmless to humans. Only the very largest lizard species pose any threat of death. The chief impact of lizards on humans is positive, as they are the main predators of pest species. Humans also keep many lizards as pets and some species are even eaten as food.

HABITAT AND DIET

Lizards can be found in every continent except Antarctica, and they live in all habitats except extremely cold areas and oceans. Most lizards live on the ground, but others can be found making their home in a tree, in a burrow, or in water. Different lizard species eat different types of food. They feed on wide variety of foods including fruits and vegetation, insects, small mammals, birds, and amphibians, carrion and even (in the cases of large predator lizards) large prey such as deer and other big animals.



Lizard Facts

BEHAVIOR

- Most lizards are active during daylight hours, when their acute binocular vision can be used to its greatest advantage.
- Vision is necessary for most non burrowing species. The family Gekkonidae, however, is composed predominantly of species that are most active from dusk to dawn. In conjunction with night activity, geckos are highly vocal and communicate by sound, whereas most other lizards are essentially mute.
- Lizards spend considerable time obtaining food, usually insects. Some of them, like Iguanian lizards, tend to perch motionless at familiar sites and wait for prey.
- They detect their prey using visual cues, dash from their perches to where the prey item is, and capture it with their tongue in a process known as lingual prehension (in some cases, their tongues can extend to twice their body length).
- Iguanian lizards are typically referred to as “sit-and-wait” predators. In contrast, autarchic gloss lizards (the non-gecko scleroglossa lizards such as amphisbaenians, skinks, whiptails, and others) actively search for prey by probing and digging, using their well-developed chemosensory system in a process called vomero olfaction, as well as visual cues. These lizards do not use the tongue to capture prey; rather, they grab their prey in their jaws.



Lizard Facts



Anole's brightly coloured throat fan, or dewlap, signals possession of a territory and attracts females.

TERRITORIALITY

- Social interactions among lizards are best understood for the species that respond to visual stimuli. Many lizards defend certain areas against intruders of the same or closely related species. Territorial defense does not always involve actual combat. These often involve the erection of crests along the back and neck and the sudden increase in the size of an individual through puffing and posturing.
- Many species display bright colours by extending a throat fan or exposing a coloured patch of skin and engage in stereotyped movements such as push-ups, head bobbing, and tail waving.
- Large, colourful horns and other forms of conspicuous head and body ornamentation are often restricted to males, but females of many species defend their territories by employing stereotyped movements similar to those of males. However, this is evidently advantageous and has evolved through natural selection.
- Territories are usually associated with limited resources (such as nest sites, food, and refuges from predators), and a male that possesses a territory will likely attract females.



Lizard Facts



Baby Grand Cayman blue iguana hatching from its egg.

FAMILY LIFE

- Male lizards use a variety of methods to attract a female's attention. They bob their head vigorously or display their brightest colors or best features.
- The green anole lizard, for example, inflates a rust-colored throat sack to win over the female of his choice, sometimes keeping up this display for hours. But when the male needs to make sure others see him, his head turns fiery red and his body and tail change to a bright, shiny blue.
- Other males may fight with each other until the weaker one gives up.
- Most female lizards lay soft, leathery eggs — they don't stick around to protect the eggs from harm or keep them warm.
- The tokay gecko lays soft eggs that harden in the dry air and stick to the surface on which they were laid.
- The sandstone gecko lays eggs in rocky crevices, so these eggs have a tough cover.
- The Nile monitor lizard lays her eggs in termite mounds. No matter what the circumstances of their start in life, baby lizards look like tiny versions of their parents.



Lizard Facts



VENOMOUS VARIETIES



- Only three lizard species are clinically venomous: the Komodo Dragon, Mexican Beaded Lizard, and the Gila Monster.
- Beaded Lizards are found along the western coast of Mexico and the Gila Monster in southwestern US into northern Mexico.
- Even though myths and legends surround these two creatures because their bite can cause serious injury, no human fatalities have ever been reliably recorded.
- Recent research has also shown that Komodo Dragons are in fact venomous. This large species of lizard can be found in the Indonesian islands of Komodo, Rinca, Flores, Gili Motang, and Padar.

SPECIES OF LIZARDS

Agamas



Males in some species of Agamids develop dramatically colorful markings on the body during breeding season. This color change plays a part in communication and reproductive behavior.

Anoles



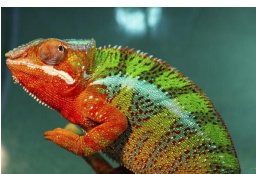
Some species of anoles are very territorial. Some have even been witnessed showing aggressive behavior to their reflections in mirrors. Anoles are also used as native pest control, as they eat spiders, cockroaches, and other bugs. Anoles changes colors based on its mood and surroundings.

Casquehead Lizards



The basilisk lizard, also known as Jesus Christ lizard, has large hind feet with flaps of skin between each toe, this allows them to run fast on the surface of water.

Chameleons



Chameleons are uniquely adapted for climbing and visual hunting. They have the most distinctive eyes of any reptile, they can focus separately to observe two different objects simultaneously.



Lizard Facts

SPECIES OF LIZARDS

Chameleons- The spiral tail helps in balancing and grasping branches. They are known for the ability to change their body color to blend in with the environment. The slow movements and the accurate aim of the long tongue makes them successful hunters.

Desert Horned Lizard



Desert Horned Lizards have spikes on the body for defense against predators. These lizards use a camouflage and ambush style of hunting.

Frilled Dragon



The frilled lizard is fairly large species of lizard that can grow to nearly a meter in length. The long tail and sharp claws of the frilled lizard help the frilled lizard when it is climbing around in the trees. Like many other species of lizard, the frilled lizard is an omnivorous animal and it will therefore eat almost anything it can find.

Gecko



The most well-known species of gecko is the leopard gecko - it is commonly kept as a pet. Leopard geckos always appear to be smiling, this is not because they are always happy, but because of the way their head and mouth is shaped.

Gila Monsters & Beaded Lizards



Gila monsters don't need to eat very often as they can store fat in their large tails. They are able to go months and even a year between meals. They are venomous lizards, however the venom is only used in defense and not for subduing prey.

Iguanas & Spinytail Iguanas



Green iguanas are one of the most popular reptile pets in the United States and are also among the largest lizards in the Americas, averaging around 6.5 feet (2 meters) long and weighing about 11 pounds (5 kilograms). Its average lifespan in the wild is 20 years



Lizard Facts

SPECIES OF LIZARDS

Komodo Dragons



Komodo dragons are the biggest and heaviest lizards on Earth. The largest Komodo dragon ever found was 10.3 feet (3.1 meters) long and weighed 366 pounds (166 kilograms).

Legless Lizards



They are often mistaken to be snakes because of their appearance. If observed closely they have eyelids, which distinguishes them from snakes.

Mexican Beaded Lizards



The beaded lizard is an animal to admire from a safe distance, not one to handle casually. Long-term captive beaded lizards often become sluggish and seemingly tame, but they should never be fully trusted to not administer a lightning fast, bulldog-like bite.

Neotropical Ground Lizards



When fighting for a mate, these lizards stand high on all fours, usually sideways to their opponent to maximize their apparent size while bobbing up and down.

Tegus & Whiptails



Some species of whiptail lizards have all-female or nearly all-female populations. This lizard reproduces by parthenogenesis (process of asexual reproduction).

True or Wall Lizards

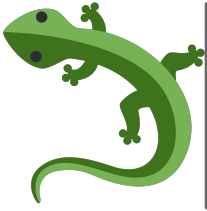


Most species of wall lizards are sexually dimorphic, which means that males and females have different patterns.

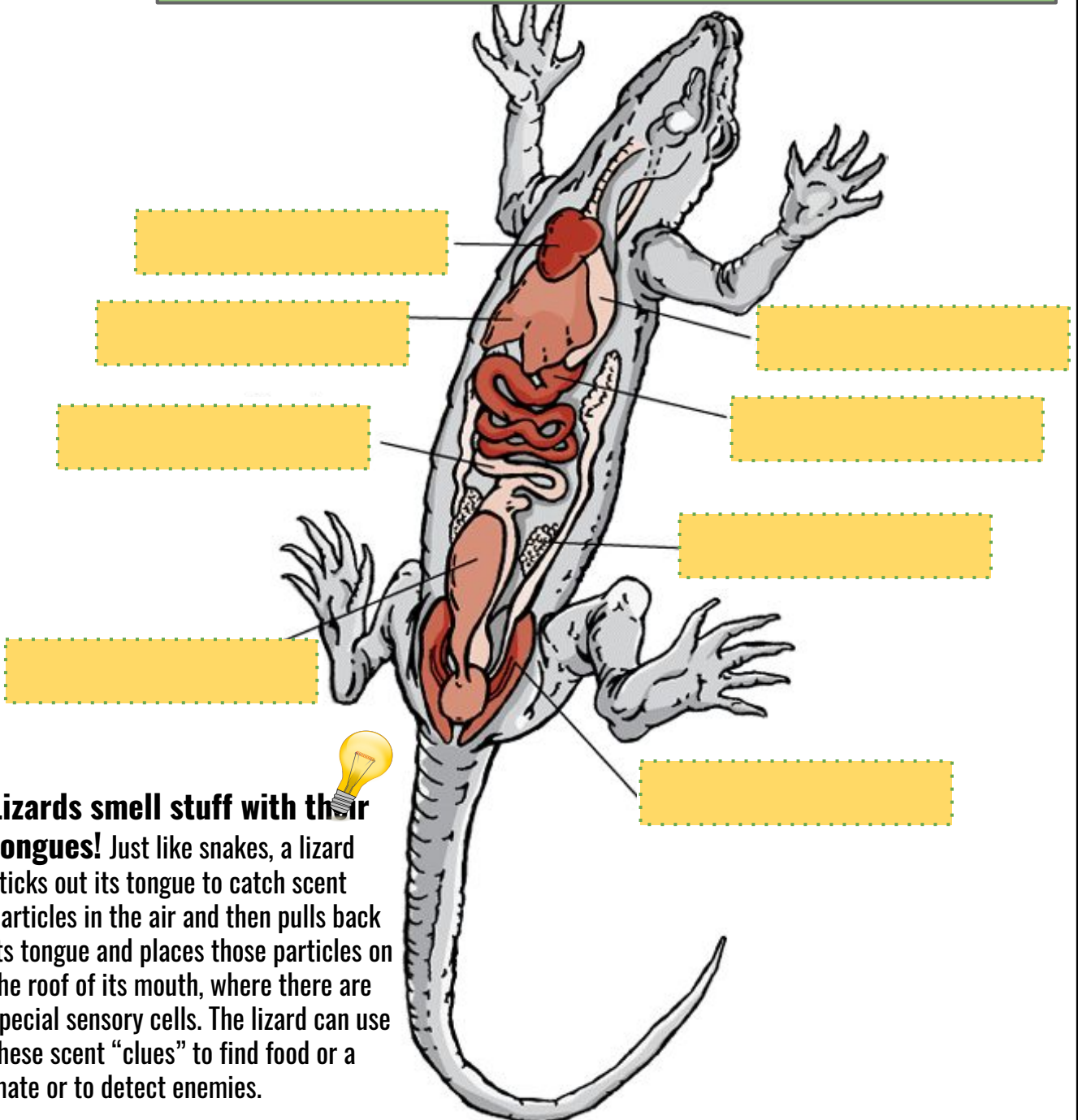


Name: _____

Anatomy of a Lizard



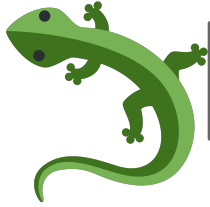
Lizards are one of the biggest, most diverse and widespread group of reptiles found on Earth. Label the lizard's parts by labeling the boxes.



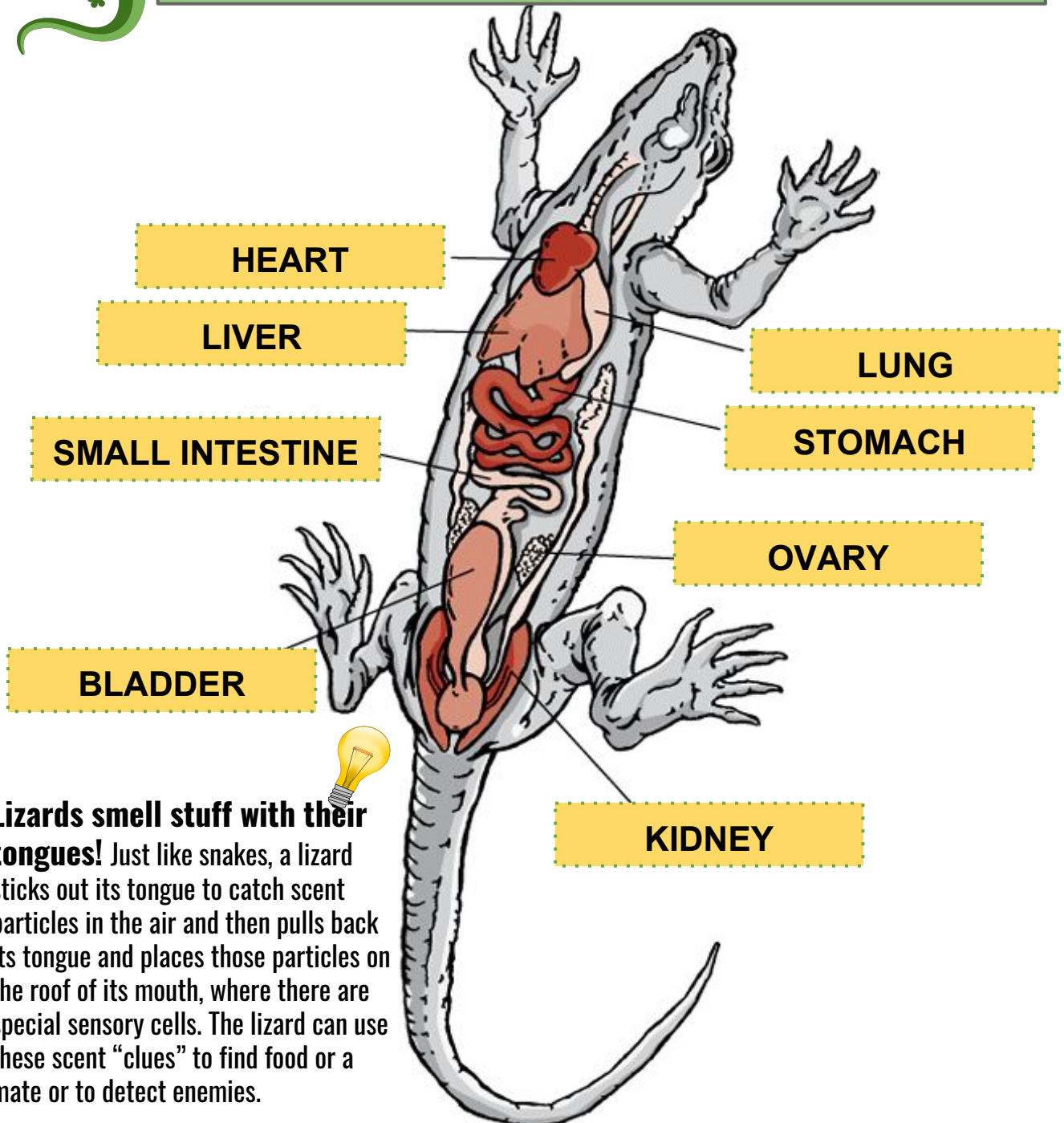
Lizards smell stuff with their tongues! Just like snakes, a lizard sticks out its tongue to catch scent particles in the air and then pulls back its tongue and places those particles on the roof of its mouth, where there are special sensory cells. The lizard can use these scent "clues" to find food or a mate or to detect enemies.



Anatomy of a Lizard



ANSWER KEY



Lizards smell stuff with their tongues! Just like snakes, a lizard sticks out its tongue to catch scent particles in the air and then pulls back its tongue and places those particles on the roof of its mouth, where there are special sensory cells. The lizard can use these scent “clues” to find food or a mate or to detect enemies.



Copyright Notice

This resource is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0](#) International license.