

Cool Facts - Lizards



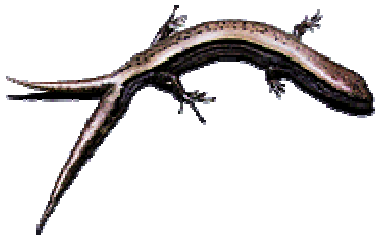
Lizards are found everywhere on earth except the Arctic and the Antarctic. There are 13 species of lizards found in Missouri - all of them are harmless. The largest lizard family is the skinks. There are nearly 1400 species worldwide; Missouri claims seven species.

Some lizards have no legs and might be mistaken for snakes. But you can always tell a lizard because they have eyelids and ear openings and snakes don't. Like other reptiles, lizards lay eggs, have scales and a tough outer skin and are *ectothermic* or 'cold-blooded'. While many species lay their eggs and abandon them, skinks and glass lizards stay with the eggs until they hatch, guarding them from predators.

The most common lizard in our state is the 5-Lined Skink; the rarest is the Texas Horned Lizard. The Slender Glass Lizard is the longest; it looks like a snake because it doesn't have legs. The largest is the Collared Lizard which can grow to 14 inches. The smallest is the Ground Skink - a newly hatched baby will fit on a dime!



A lizard can release a part of all of his tail when he is grabbed by a predator.



Once the tail is broken off, he runs for shelter and is safe; he leaves his squirming tail to confuse or distract the enemy. His tail has special muscles that constrict at a break point and prevent blood loss. Eventually the lizard grows a new tail, but it isn't a colorful or as elegant

as the original. It may take three or four months for the 'new' tail to grow. Sometimes the tail doesn't break off cleanly and the lizard looks as if he has two tails!

The lizards in Missouri generally eat insects (grasshoppers, ants, crickets and beetles) and spiders. They are valuable as a natural control of destructive species like termites. One species of lizard, the Eastern Collared Lizard, even eats other lizards.



Like snakes, lizards smell by 'tasting' the air. When lizards flutter the underside of their throats, they are smelling by moving air past a specialized organ called the Jacobson's organ.

Lizards NEVER stop growing. They shed in little pieces when they outgrow their skin, not all at once like snakes. They also replace their teeth throughout their lives.

Myth or Fact?

Some lizards cry bloody tears.

TRUE. Texas Horned Lizards, also called Horned Toads, defend themselves by puffing up and ejecting a small amount of blood from the inner corner of each eye to confuse predators. Interesting, they only do this when caught by a mammal.



A lizard bite is extremely painful; you should go to the emergency room.

FALSE. If you capture a large skink or a Fence Lizard, its bite will feel like a pinch. A Collared Lizard, with stronger jaws, can cause a superficial bite that might bleed slightly.

If a lizard bites you, it will hold on until it thunders.

FALSE. They really have no interest in holding on that long.

The tail of a skink is poisonous and can sting you.

FALSE. Their tail doesn't have a stinger and is not venomous.

Collared Lizards run on their hind legs like T-Rex.

TRUE. When startled, they rear up and run on two legs.

