

Reptiles

There are five reptile groups: crocodilians, turtles, lizards, snakes and lizard-like tuataras. All reptiles have scales to protect them from the sun and from other animals. Like the hair of mammals and the feathers of birds, the scales are made up of dead tissue. All reptiles shed their skin at some time. The number of times they shed depends on the diet, the age and the health of the animal. Snakes shed their skin in one long piece. They crawl out of the old skin by turning it inside out. Most lizards shed their skin in patches while crocodilians and turtles shed one plate at any time. Young reptiles shed their skin more often than older ones because they are growing. Most reptiles have teeth which are also shed and replaced often. Some snakes, especially poisonous ones, have special teeth called fangs. These fangs are hollow and are used to inject venom into prey. Turtles do not have teeth but have a sharp beak. All reptiles have backbones and breathe with lungs. Reptiles are cold-blooded because when the day is cold, the reptiles' blood is cool, but when the day is warm the reptiles' blood is warm. Some reptiles lay eggs and some have births. A few reptiles build nests for their eggs. Young are on their own at birth or hatching. They must face the world alone. The babies look just like their parents but are tiny. Reptiles have poor sight and hearing. Their sense of touch is fairly good. Snakes are able to detect other approaching animals from vibrations they get through the ground. Snakes are deaf and do not have outside ear openings.