The Reptiles, Amphibians, and Fish

Questions & Answers Book

SNAKES

LIZARDS

TURTLES

CROCODILIANS

AMPHIBIANS

FISH

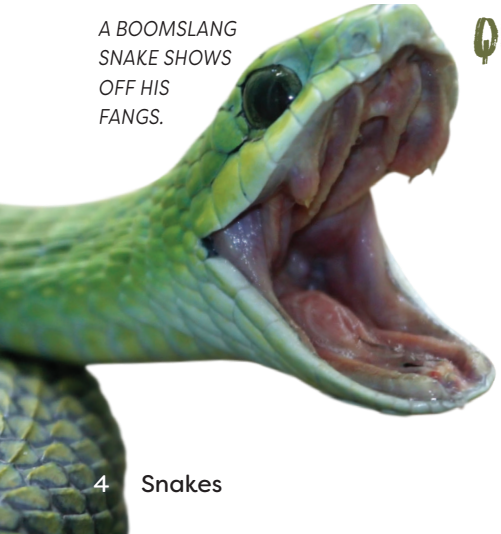
THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

Written by The Good and the Beautiful Team

QUESTION: How long can snakes grow?

ANSWER: The record for the longest snake kept in captivity goes to a reticulated python (*Python reticulatus*) that measures over 7 m (25 ft) in length! Her name is Medusa, and she weighs 159 kg (350 lb) and can eat an entire deer in one sitting. An even longer snake was found in the wild; the 10 m (32 ft) reticulated python was found in Indonesia, in 1912. There are many claims of larger snakes, but none that have been officially recorded. Anacondas are another species of snake that are known to grow very large.

A RETICULATED PYTHON HOLDS THE RECORD FOR THE LONGEST SNAKE KEPT IN CAPTIVITY.



A BOOMSLANG SNAKE SHOWS OFF HIS FANGS.

QUESTION: How do snakes produce venom?

ANSWER: Snake venom is a highly specialized form of saliva produced by salivary glands in the snake's head. Many venomous snakes have hollow fangs that work like hypodermic needles. When they bite, the muscles in their heads squeeze the venom glands, plunging the venom through the fangs and into the victim. Snakes have different venom types that can affect the muscular system, nervous system, or circulatory system.

GUESS WHAT!

Which snake has the largest fangs?

That would be the African gaboon viper. The 1.8 m (6 ft) snake can have fangs over 5.1 cm (2 in) long!

QUESTION: Can lizards walk on two legs or run on water?

ANSWER: The basilisk lizard has an unusual way of fleeing from predators. As its hind legs pick up the pace, its front legs rise off the ground so that it ends up running on just the two hind legs. It runs faster on all four legs, but it is thought that its two-legged sprint helps it look more intimidating and also enables it to better see what lies ahead. The top recorded speed for this lizard is about 11.3 km (7 mi) per hour. Basilisk lizards are also known for running across the surface of water.

THE GREEN BASILISK LIZARD CAN RUN ON WATER!

DID YOU KNOW?

How long can a lizard live without a drink?

The thorny devil can go months without drinking water. This spiky lizard has specialized skin with thorns that collect dew as water vapor condenses on them. The dew droplets run along tiny grooves in the thorny devil's skin until they reach the lizard's mouth. What an amazing design for a desert-dwelling creature!

QUESTION: Can all turtles draw their heads into their shells?

ANSWER: Turtles are notoriously slow-moving, so they rely on a form of protection that is very different from many animals. Instead of trying to escape, many turtles will retreat into their armored shells. Most of the land-dwelling types are able to retract their legs, tail, and neck far enough into the shell to be protected from predators. Some even have hinged parts to their shells that will clamp closed. The big-headed turtle is an exception. It is a land turtle with a very large head! Instead of drawing its head into its shell, its heavily armored head and strong bite are used for defense when danger approaches. It can deliver a nasty snap! The snake-necked turtle also cannot pull its long neck into its shell. Instead, it relies on a stinky musk that it can spray up to a meter (about 3 ft) away to deter predators. Sea turtles typically rely on their wide flippers to carry them swiftly away from danger and are unable to retreat into their flatter, sometimes softer shells.

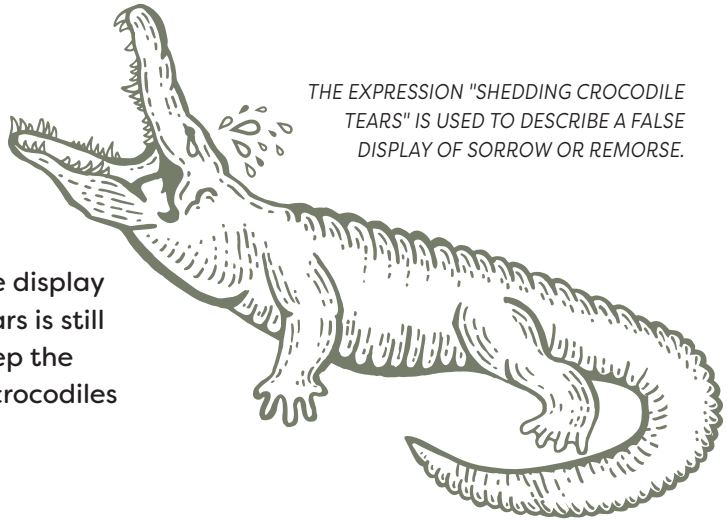
EASTERN BOX TURTLE

GUESS WHAT!

The alligator snapping turtle residing in North America has its own fishing bait! It is well camouflaged in the muddy rivers and streams where it lies motionless with its mouth wide open. Inside its mouth, a bright pink tongue wiggles and appears to fish as a tasty worm. Hungry fish dart into its mouth, thinking they have found a quick meal, but soon find themselves snapped up as the turtle slams its powerful jaws shut around them!

QUESTION: Is there really such a thing as "crocodile tears"?

ANSWER: Crocodiles do shed tears, but it isn't because they are sad. This is why the expression of someone "shedding crocodile tears" means that the tears do not represent true repentance but are a false display of sorrow or remorse. The real reason behind these tears is still being studied. Some think the tears simply help to keep the crocodile's eyes clean, while others believe saltwater crocodiles "cry" to rid themselves of excess salt.



THE EXPRESSION "SHEDDING CROCODILE TEARS" IS USED TO DESCRIBE A FALSE DISPLAY OF SORROW OR REMORSE.

CROCODILES DO PRODUCE TEARS, BUT NOT OUT OF REMORSE.

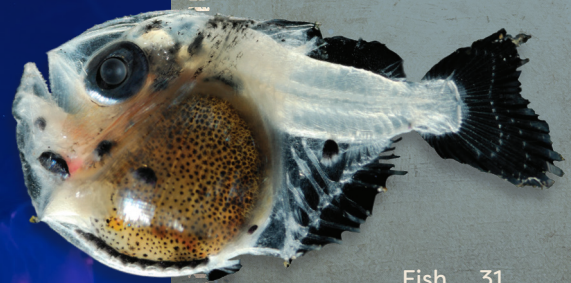
QUESTION: Why do amphibians lay their eggs in water?

ANSWER: Most amphibians lay their eggs in water since their young are equipped with gills instead of lungs. Also, the eggs of amphibians are not equipped with hard shells to keep them from drying out; if they were laid on land, the eggs would quickly dry and the young would not survive. But not all frogs and toads lay their jellylike eggs in water and hope they hatch. The midwife toad is one such oddity. The female lays a strand of eggs that the male fertilizes once they are laid. He then wraps the string of eggs around his legs and back to protect them from aquatic predators. Because the midwife toad has a back covered in warts that secrete a horrible smell, most predators leave it alone. When the time comes for the eggs to hatch, the male midwife toad makes his way to a shallow pool where the tadpoles spring out of their eggs!

THE MALE MIDWIFE TOAD FERTILIZES THE STRAND OF EGGS LAID BY THE FEMALE AND WRAPS THE STRAND AROUND HIS BODY TO PROTECT THE EGGS FROM PREDATORS.

QUESTION: What is the purpose of bioluminescence, and how does it work in ocean creatures?

ANSWER: Bioluminescence is the production of light by a living organism. You may have seen this phenomenon in fireflies! It is more common in marine creatures as well as in some fungi and bacteria, but it is only rarely found in freshwater creatures. In some living organisms, light can result from a chemical reaction of two substances called luciferin and luciferase. A type of plankton called dinoflagellates can make luciferin, but many sea creatures that exhibit bioluminescence do not produce light themselves. Instead, they "capture" it from these tiny sea creatures by eating them and then storing the glowing substances in their own light organs. Light organs can be in one spot of an animal's body or distributed all throughout the skin, such as in some squid. Bioluminescence can be used to lure and hunt prey, to light up an otherwise dark area to look for prey, to confuse would-be predators so a quick escape can be made, and to signal to potential mates.



GUESS WHAT!

A hatchetfish lights up the underside of its body with just the right amount of illumination to match the light coming from the ocean's surface. This effectively disguises its shadow, making it nearly impossible for predators that may be underneath the hatchetfish to notice it.

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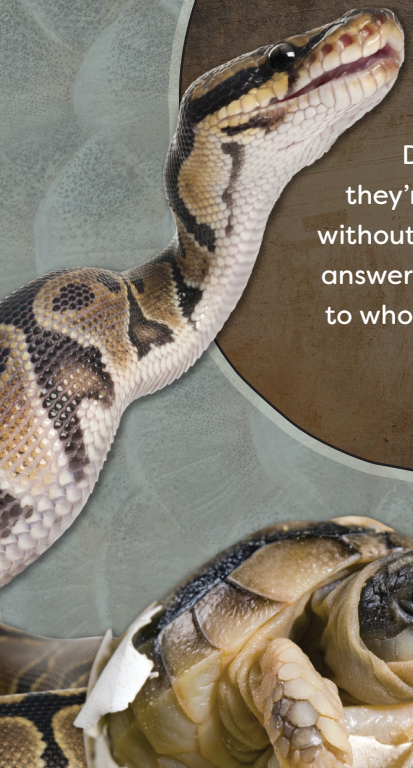

Did you know there are lizards that can glide so far they look like they're flying? Have you ever wondered how geckos can run along ceilings without falling? The Reptiles, Amphibians, and Fish Questions & Answers Book answers these questions and more, from which animal has the strongest bite, to who lives in the deepest part of the ocean. Stunning real-life imagery and fascinating facts make this a must-have book for all ages.

ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

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