

Exploding Myths

- Snakes are not slimy.
- You can't tell the age of a turtle by counting the rings on its shell.
- Alligators and crocodile jaws do not hinge differently.
- Rattlers do not always rattle before they strike.
- Black snakes and rattlesnakes do not interbreed.
- No snake has a stinger on its tail. All venomous snakes inject venom with fangs.
- More people die from bee stings each year than snakebites. In the United States, about 8,000 people receive venomous snakebites. Only nine to fifteen of those people die.
- When a snake molts, it does not "crawl out of its skin." The molting process is more like a sock being pulled off. A snake sheds by rubbing its lips against a rough surface, like a tree or rock. This helps to start the epidermis or outer skin rolling backward. The snake then wriggles out of its epidermis by peeling it backward over its body, turning inside out as it goes.
- There is no surefire way to tell from a distance whether a snake is venomous. While it is true that vipers usually have triangular-shaped heads, this has little meaning in as much as some harmless snakes flatten their heads into the same shape when angry. The eastern coral snake has dangerous venom, but there are many harmless milk snakes that mimic its coloration. Fortunately only in the coral snake do the red bands touch the yellow bands. As the old adage says, "red touch yellow kill a fellow; red touch black, venom lack."
- There are no sea snakes in the Atlantic Ocean. About 50 species are found in the warm and temperate waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
- You can not determine the age of a rattlesnake by counting the number of segments on the rattle.

Did You Know?

- Snakes have no external ears and are deaf to airborne sounds for all practical purposes. The snake charmer does not charm the cobra with his flute music. The cobra sways to the motion of the snake charmer.
- A Diamond-back Rattlesnake can strike the entire length of its body, but a half or two thirds of the length is more common.
- All rattlesnakes in the United States give live birth.
- Rattlesnakes vibrate their tails rapidly- approximately 50 cycles per second. It often sounds more like a hiss than rattles clicking.
- Both the Gila Monster and the Beaded Lizard have extremely powerful jaws and can crush small prey animals.
- The Komodo Dragon is the largest lizard and males can exceed ten feet in length.

Curious Reptile Facts

- **What is the difference between venom and poison?** Venom is injected. In the case of snakes, venom passes through grooved or hollow fangs. Poison is either ingested or comes in contact with the skin.
- **What snake has the longest fangs?** The fangs of the Gaboon Viper from Africa are the longest; up to two inches in length.
- **What is the longest snake?** The Reticulated Python. One specimen was measured at 32 feet, 10 inches in length.
- **How many species of crocodilians are there?** 22 or 23 depending on which authority you ask.
- **How many sounds can crocodilians make?** Over 25 distinct sounds have been identified and each has a particular meaning.
- **How many venomous lizards are there?** Two. The Gila Monster from the southwestern United States and the Beaded Lizard from Mexico.
- **What are the two main types of venom?**
Reptiles produce two main types of venom, and most have a combination of both. Neurotoxins attack the nervous system, and hemotoxins attack the circulatory system.
- **How is anti-venom produced?**
Small quantities of venom are injected into a horse or other animal over an extended period. Antibodies in the animal's blood are then used to make snakebite serum.
- **How is snake venom potency measured?**
It is measured in "mouse units". LD50 is the amount of venom (lethal dose) required to kill 50% of the individuals within a study group of mice. Each mouse is injected with exactly the same quantity of venom.