

What is a Reptile?

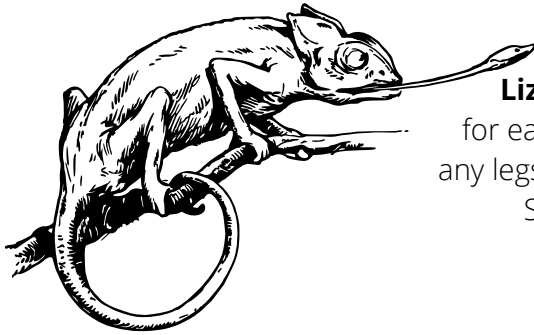
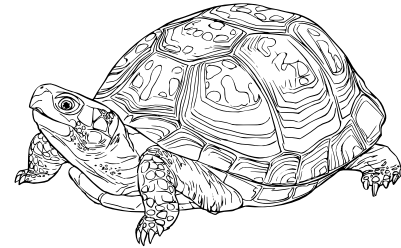
Reptiles are a group of animals that have certain things in common.

All reptiles are **ectothermic**, or "cold blooded". This means that they do not make heat inside their bodies. If you put a sweater on a turtle, it wouldn't get any warmer! They get their body heat from the temperature of the air around them.

Reptiles also have **scales** covering their skin that protects them from injuries and makes them waterproof. They shed their scales to reveal new scales underneath as they grow, sort of like how humans shed our skin and reveal new skin underneath after a sunburn.

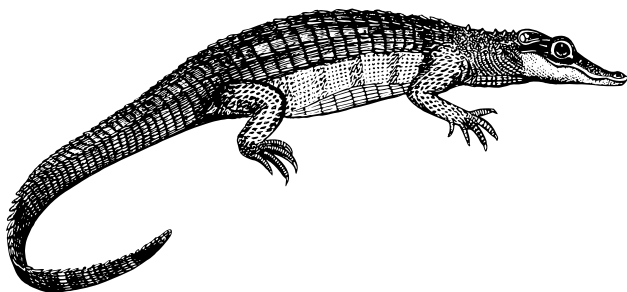
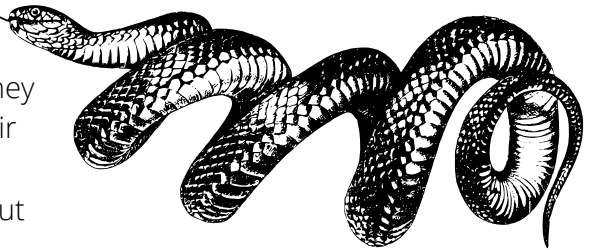
Most reptiles also lay **soft-shelled eggs**, but some snakes give live birth!

Turtles are reptiles with four legs, a hard beak for their mouth, and a protective shell formed from their ribcage. Most turtles can hide their bodies inside their shell, but they can never leave it because it is part of their skeleton. There are over 30 species of turtles in Florida.



Lizards are reptiles with four legs, openings for ears, and long tails. Some lizards don't have any legs at all, like the glass lizards that live in the Southern United States. There are over 40 species of lizards in Florida.

Snakes are reptiles with no legs. They shed their scales in one big piece. We have a lot of snake skins on display at the nature center and you might be able to find some near your house. They are all carnivores, and swallow their prey whole by opening their mouths wide. If a human could open their mouth like a snake, they could swallow an entire watermelon whole! There are about 50 species of snakes in Florida, and 6 of them are venomous.



Crocodilians are large reptiles with four legs and flat snouts. Their eyes and nostrils are on the top of their head so they can see and breathe above the water. Their scales have hard bones underneath them that make the scales even stronger and more protective. There are two species of crocodilians in Florida, the American Alligator and the American Crocodile.

Tuatara are reptiles that look a lot like lizards, but they have a third eye on their forehead underneath their skin and two rows of teeth in their upper jaw. There is only one tuatara species, and it lives in New Zealand, not in Florida.

