

Name: _____

An Ancient Reptile

by Guy Belleranti



What present-day reptile lived at the time of the dinosaurs and has three eyes? The tuatara,

What are their homes like?

Tuatara live in underground burrows. Usually they don't dig their burrows, but instead live in burrows made by nesting sea birds. The two might even live in the burrow at the same time! When this happens the tuatara sometimes eats the seabird's eggs, so tuatara are not good roommates!

They're Lizards, Right?



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Males are larger than females. Adult males can grow over two feet long and weigh around two pounds.

Females, on the other hand, are about half the size of the males. They can grow up to 18 inches long and weigh about a pound.

While both males and females have a spiky crest of scales on their backs and tails the male's crest is larger.

Unlike lizards, tuatara do not have ear openings. They can hear, but their ears are located under their skin, like a snake's.

Adult tuatara are more active at night while adult lizards are more active during the day. While adult tuatara like to sun themselves sometimes, they usually prefer much cooler weather than lizards and most other reptiles.

Young tuatara are more active during the day so they aren't eaten by adult tuatara at night.

Three Eyes?

I mentioned before that a tuatara has three eyes. If you could look at one up-close, you might not be able to find the extra eye right away. It's located on top of the animal's head, beneath its scaly skin. (You can see it pretty clearly on young hatchlings. When the animal grows, the eye gets covered with skin.)

How Many Eggs Do They Lay?

A mother tuatara will lay up to 19 eggs about once every four years. Like many other reptiles, gender is determined by the eggs' temperature. When eggs are laid in a warm place, they produce males. When eggs are laid in a cooler place, they produce females.

Are They Rare?



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Tuatara are carnivores, or meat-eaters. Adults come out at night to hunt for insects, bird eggs, baby birds, lizards, and frogs. They'll even eat young tuatara.

How Long Do They Live?

Tuatara grow very slowly, but they have long lives. It isn't uncommon for them to live over 60 years. A few have been known to live over 100 years.

past two hundred years, humans brought rats, dogs, cats, and ferrets to New Zealand.

These new predators ate the reptiles and their eggs. Today the wild tuatara are an endangered species.



About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes mainly from his experiences working with animals and teaching others.

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1. Where do tuatara live?
 - a. in the ocean
 - b. in the Northern Hemisphere
 - c. in the Southern Hemisphere
 - d. on islands in Asia



2. If you found a tuatara that measured 22 inches long and weighed 1.9 pounds, would it be male or female? Tell how you know.



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4. How long can tuatara live?
 - a. about a decade
 - b. a couple centuries
 - c. about as long as a dog
 - d. about as long as a human being
5. Why are tuatara an endangered species?
 - a. Predators have been introduced into their habitats.
 - b. They are hunted by humans.
 - c. The Earth is becoming too warm for them.
 - d. Seabirds no longer allow tuatara in their burrows.

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.



_____ 1. dinosaurs

a. underground animal homes

_____ 2. pound

b. area of skin that projects upward on an animal



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_____ 6. native

f. classification as male or female

_____ 7. crest

g. sixteen ounces

_____ 8. gender

h. belonging to a place naturally

◆ **Now try this:** On a sheet of lined paper, use each vocabulary word from above in a sentence.

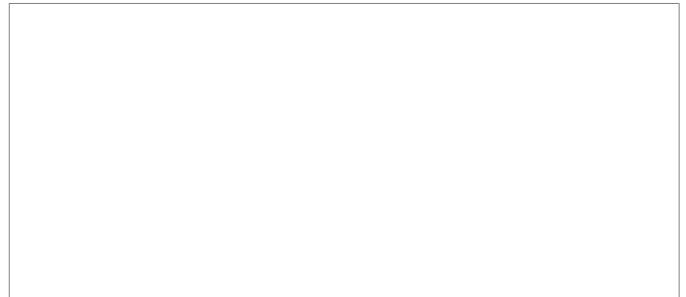
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In the article, "Tuatara " you learned about the tuatara, an endangered reptile from New Zealand.

Think of another endangered species that you know about. Draw a picture of it in the box. Then, describe the animal and tell why it is endangered.



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ANSWER KEY

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1. Where do tuatara live? **c**
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a. underground animal homes

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sentence.