



## Desert Iguana

Kingdom: Animalia  
 Phylum: Chordata  
 Subphylum: Vertebrata  
 Class: Reptilia  
 Order: Squamata  
 Family: Iguanidae  
 Genus: *Dipsosaurus*  
 Species: *dorsalis*



Photo Courtesy of Jeff Hewitt

### Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The desert iguana is found from the Mojave Desert to the Baja Desert. This includes the states of California, Nevada, southern Utah, Baja California, and Arizona. The desert iguana lives in sandy areas that have shrubs with low vegetation.
- **Exhibit Location:** USS Antiquities

### Characteristics

- Length (head to tail): 16 inches or 40 centimeters
- The desert iguana is a medium-sized lizard with long toes and a narrow head. Its body is very thin and elongated.
- Its color is dark brown or pale gray with tan or brown reticulated pattern on back and sides. They may have white spots on the back and/or rows of brown spots on the tail.
- In mating season, both males and females have a pinkish pigment on their sides.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** less than 7 years **In Captivity** up to 7 years

### Behaviors

- The desert iguana can survive the most extreme heat. Temperatures of up to 115°F can be tolerated.
- The animals are diurnal (active during the day) when most other animals are hiding from the heat.
- The desert iguana hibernates during the winter and becomes active again around mid-March.
- During the day, it is usually found on the ground foraging for food in shrubs or basking in the sun.
- The desert iguana burrows near shrubs or sand hummocks (knolls) where it can escape from the heat and predators. It often uses the burrows of the kangaroo rat.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** food items, interactions with other lizards

### Reproduction

- Little is known about the reproduction of the desert iguana. They are difficult to breed in captivity.
- Sexual maturity is around 31-33 months.
- In the wild they dig burrows in which to lay eggs during the months of May through July. There are usually 3-8 eggs in a clutch (group of eggs). There may be 2 clutches laid in a year from a single female.
- Hatchlings are 3-4 inches long.
- Parents are not involved with parenting after the eggs hatch. This allows more hatchlings to survive.

### Diet

- **In the Wild:** flowers, leaves usually from the creosote bush, insects, sometimes their own feces or that of other animals
- **At the Zoo:** Herp herb diet (greens, yams, beans, etc.), mealworms, crickets

## **Conservation Status**

- **IUCN status:** least concern **CITES Appendix:** not listed
- There are over 100,000 adults.
- Some destruction of habitat is occurring with residential and commercial development of land.
- They may be seen running across the road.
- Predators: humans, snakes, some desert mammals, raptors

## **Did You Know?/Fun Facts**

- The desert iguana can lose its tail. By dropping its tail, the predator will go after the tail which allows the iguana to escape to safety.
- The desert iguana can mark its territory with a secretion that fluoresces but no one else can see.

## **Sources:**

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