

COMMON CHAMELEON

CARD 10

GROUP 3: REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

CLASS
Reptilia

ORDER
Squamata

FAMILY
Chamaeleontidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Chamaeleo chamaeleon



The chameleon is unique among reptiles because of its ability to change color. This adaptation allows it to both catch prey and avoid predators.

KEY FACTS



SIZES

Head and body length: 8-12 in.
Tail length: As long as head and body.

Tongue length: As long as head and body.



BREEDING

Breeding season: Late summer.
No. of eggs: 20-30 laid on the ground. Young emerge the following spring.



LIFESTYLE

Habit: Solitary, except during breeding season. Daytime hunters.
Diet: Almost all insects and spiders.



RELATED SPECIES

There are about 100 species of chameleon. The largest is about 2 ft. long, and the smallest 2 in. The larger species will catch lizards, small mammals, and birds.



Range of the common chameleon.

DISTRIBUTION

The coast of southern Spain is the northernmost point of this chameleon's range. On the southern side of the Mediterranean, it is found along the coast of North Africa, extending into Israel.

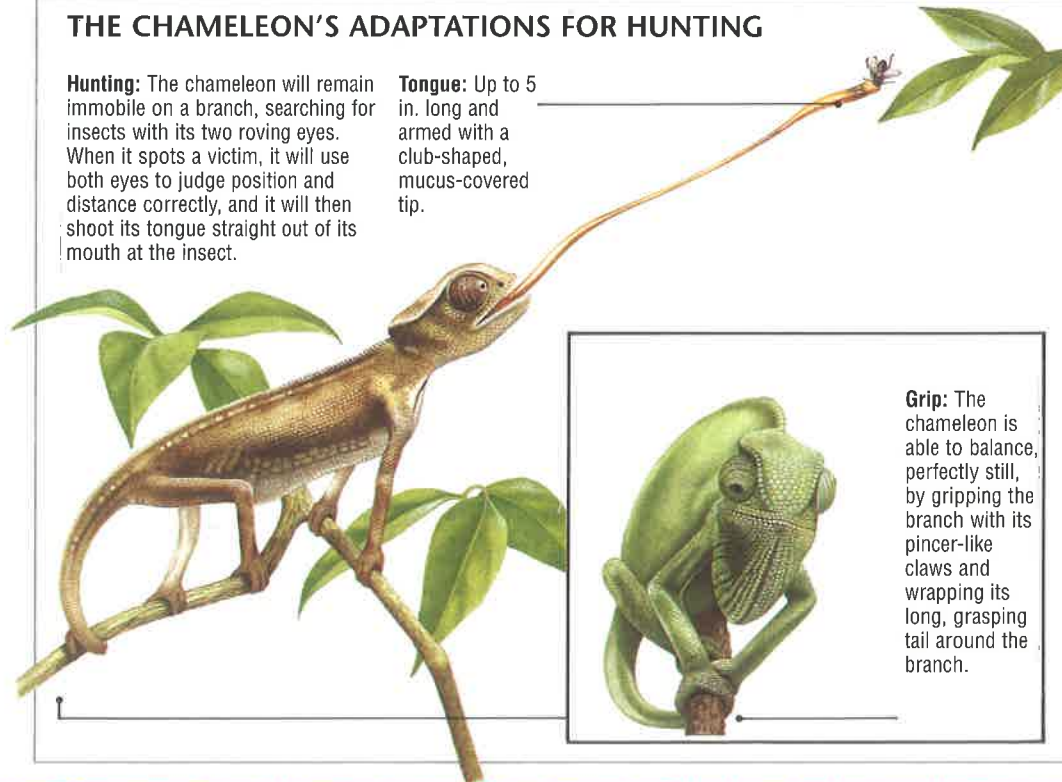
CONSERVATION

The common chameleon is not endangered. But in cold summers, its numbers are greatly reduced.

THE CHAMELEON'S ADAPTATIONS FOR HUNTING

Hunting: The chameleon will remain immobile on a branch, searching for insects with its two roving eyes. When it spots a victim, it will use both eyes to judge position and distance correctly, and it will then shoot its tongue straight out of its mouth at the insect.

Tongue: Up to 5 in. long and armed with a club-shaped, mucus-covered tip.



Grip: The chameleon is able to balance, perfectly still, by gripping the branch with its pincer-like claws and wrapping its long, grasping tail around the branch.

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The common chameleon lives in the forests along the coast of North Africa, extending to the Middle East and along the coast of southern Spain. It spends most of the day motionless in the trees, waiting for unsuspecting insects and spiders to pass by.



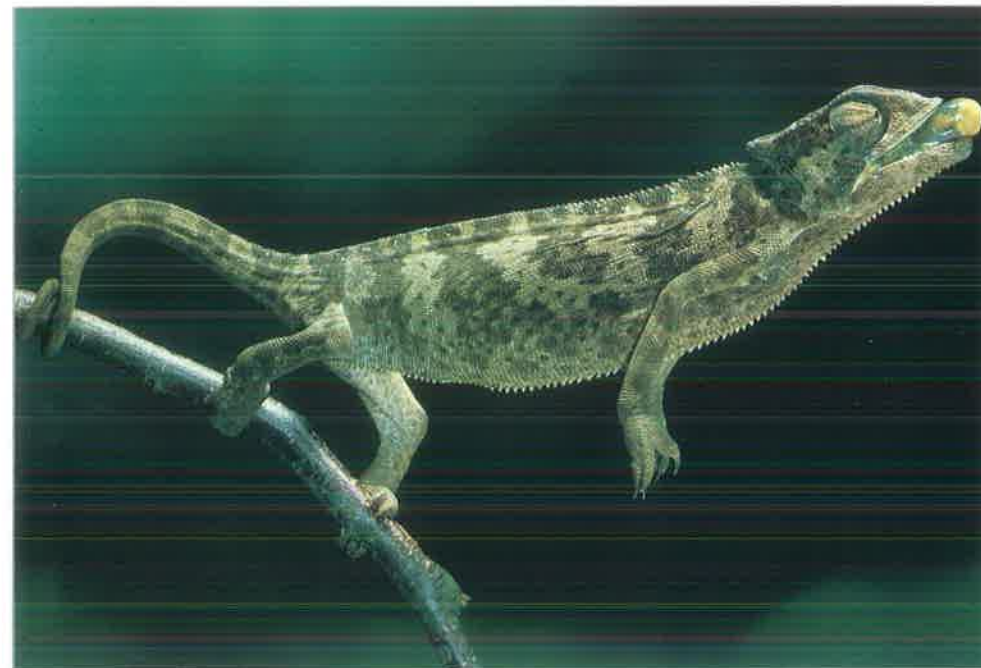
FOOD & HUNTING

The chameleon is a master of disguise. It can change color to blend in with its surroundings and is unrecognizable to the spiders and insects it catches.

Without moving its body, the chameleon uses its eyes to locate prey. Once it spots its prey, the chameleon flicks out its sticky tongue and catches the insect. Fully extended, the chameleon's tongue is as long as its body.

The chameleon's ability to change color also helps it to stay hidden from its predators.

Left: Its remarkable swiveling eyes give the chameleon all-around vision.



BREEDING

The chameleon leads a solitary existence and will seek out the company of other chameleons only during the breeding season. The male chameleon guards his territory fiercely against rival males and frightens them off by inflating his lungs and puffing up his body.

Mating takes place in the trees, during which time the female's eggs are fertilized inside her body. When she is ready to lay her eggs in the late summer, the female chooses a warm spot at the

base of a tree, where she deposits up to 30 eggs. After covering them with soil, she returns to the tree-tops and leaves the eggs to develop unattended.

Inside its shell, each young chameleon feeds on the yolk sac in the same way in which a hen's chick does. When it hatches the following spring, the young breaks out of its shell with its egg tooth. When it is hatched, the young chameleon looks like a smaller version of an adult.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The first reptiles lived on earth in the Permian period, approximately 200 million years ago.
- Some chameleons sport crests on their heads.

Jackson's chameleon (*C. jacksonii*) carries a trio of frightening horns.

- When not in use, the chameleon's tail stays coiled up beneath its body.

DEFENSE

The chameleon's ability to change color is its primary defense against predators. Each chameleon has a basic color that broadly matches its habitat. Changes in its color are subtle and correspond to changes in light and shadows.

Beneath its transparent skin, the chameleon has red and yellow color cells that reflect the blue and white layers below them. Under these layers is yet another layer of brown pigment. Color changes occur when the color

cells become larger or smaller, regulating the amount of multicolored reflection each layer produces.

Below: The chameleon's skin color adopts the subtle green hues of the bush.



Above: This chameleon is poised to strike at prey with its long, sticky tongue.



SPECIAL ADAPTATIONS

The ability to change color is not the chameleon's only special feature. Its eyes can focus together, like human eyes, or separately, to observe two different objects simultaneously.

Because of the narrow structure of the chameleon's lungs and ribs, its body is very thin. This, and the fact that its color is almost identical to its surroundings, make the chameleon almost invisible.

Its long tail is *prehensile*—that is, it can be used as a fifth limb for gripping and balancing. Its tongue is also specially adapted to catch prey (see back cover).

KOMODO DRAGON

CARD 9

GROUP 3: REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

CLASS
Reptilia

ORDER
Squamata

FAMILY
Varanidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Varanus komodoensis



At 10 feet long, the Komodo dragon is the largest true lizard that has ever lived on land. It is the top predator on the small islands on which it lives.

KEY FACTS



SIZES

Length: Males, 10 ft. Females slightly smaller.

Weight: Adults, 220-300 lb.



BREEDING

Sexual maturity: 6 years.

Breeding season: June or July.

No. of eggs: Average, 12.

Incubation: 8 months.



LIFESTYLE

Habit: Usually solitary, but come together to breed and to feed on *carrion* (dead flesh).

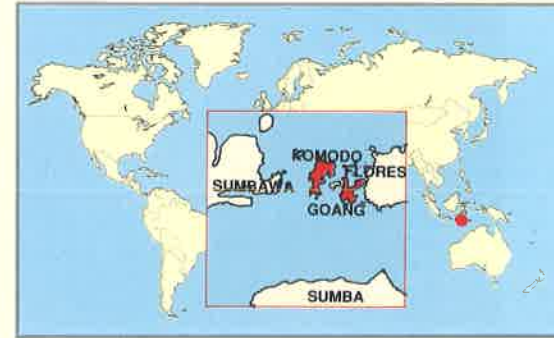
Diet: Small mammals, pigs, deer, and monkeys.

Lifespan: Estimated at 20 years.



RELATED SPECIES

The monitor lizard family includes the 10-foot water monitor as well as the tiny, 8-inch Australian short-tailed monitor.



Range of the Komodo dragon.

DISTRIBUTION

The Komodo dragon lives exclusively on the Indonesian islands of Komodo, Rintja, Padar, Gili Mota, and Owadi Sami, north of Australia.

CONSERVATION

The population is stable at about 3,000. Because the Komodo dragon lives on uninhabited islands, it is in no danger from man.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST LIZARD

Young Komodos can be identified not only by their smaller size, but also by vertical bands of black and green on their necks.



The largest member of the monitor lizard family, the Komodo dragon can exceed 10 feet in length—longer than a compact car. Wild dogs and pigs occasionally dig up and eat Komodo dragon eggs, while the young hatchlings are prey to birds and larger lizards. However, once these reptiles reach 3 feet in length, they outgrow all of their enemies. As the islands' top predators, they fear nothing—except larger Komodo dragons.

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Armed with the sharp claws and powerful tail of its mythical namesake, the Komodo dragon may not actually breathe fire, but when it is aroused, it will hiss and flick its forked tongue menacingly. The dragon's thick, scaly skin is greenish-brown and marked entirely with red circles.

HABITAT

The small Indonesian islands on which the Komodo dragon lives are hilly and sparsely covered with rainforest. The lowland areas consist mainly of open grassland and palm trees. Despite their small size, these islands support a wide range of subtropical plants and animals.

BEHAVIOR

Komodo dragons, like most cold-blooded reptiles, sleep during the night. As the sun rises and warms their blood, they become active, emerging from their resting places among tree roots and rocks and setting out in the search for food.

Despite their great size, Komodo dragons are fast-moving and agile on the ground. They occasionally climb trees, gripping them with their large, powerful claws. They are also good swimmers, taking long, powerful strokes with their tails.

When the usually solitary Komodo dragons meet, they establish a clear pecking order

BREEDING

Komodo dragons mate in late June or July. During this time, males may come into conflict with each other as they defend their territories.

Five weeks after mating, the female digs a hole in the

warm, moist earth and lays an average of a dozen eggs. The exact number and size of the eggs she lays vary, depending on the size of the female. She then covers them and leaves them to incubate unattended,



relying on the sun to keep them at the proper temperature.

The young dragons hatch eight months later. Barely 8 inches long, they are in danger of being eaten by almost every predator on the islands, from snakes and birds of prey to larger Komodo dragons. Those that survive grow quickly, and after five years, they will have reached 6 feet in length. Both males and females are mature enough to breed when they are around 6 years old.

Left: After mating, the female lays oval, white eggs in a hole excavated in the earth.

FOOD & HUNTING

Komodo dragons will eat anything they can catch and overpower, including other Komodo dragons. Favorite prey includes wild pigs, deer, and monkeys.

Though Komodos can move

quickly, they can do so only over short distances. So, they hunt by ambush, waiting for prey to wander into range, and seizing it in their jaws.

Younger Komodos are more mobile than adults, and they

will actively hunt small mammals, nestling birds, and insects. Once prey is caught, the Komodo holds it in its claws and rips off chunks of flesh with its teeth.

Komodos also eat carrion.



Above: The Komodo dragon uses its tongue to "taste" the air.

Left: When Komodo dragons meet at a kill, a clear pecking order exists, and the larger Komodos get the best pickings.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The Komodo dragon was only discovered in 1912.
- An adult Komodo dragon will eat an entire deer at once—and then sleep for a week while digesting it.
- The young hatch fully formed

from their leathery eggs that are the size of a goose's. Unlike other large monitor lizards, which have long, whip-like tails, the tail of the heavy-bodied Komodo accounts for only half of its length.

KING COBRA

CARD 8

GROUP 3: REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

ORDER
Squamata

FAMILY
Elapidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Ophiophagus hannah



Every year, thousands of people in southern Asia die from poisonous snake bites. Both humans and other poisonous snakes fear the king cobra, one of the deadliest snakes of all.

KEY FACTS



SIZES
Average length: 13 ft.
Record length: 18 ft.



BREEDING
Sexual maturity: 5-6 years.
Breeding season: Mates in January, builds nest in April.
Eggs: 20-50.
Incubation: 60-70 days.



LIFESTYLE
Habit: Solitary, but forms pairs in breeding season.
Diet: Snakes and lizards.
Lifespan: Normally 20 years.



RELATED SPECIES
Include the Asian or Indian cobra, *Naja naja*, the African black mamba, *Dendroaspis polylepis*, and the Australian death adder, *Acanthopis antarcticus*.



Range of the king cobra.

DISTRIBUTION

Throughout mainland India, southern China, and south-eastern Asia.

CONSERVATION

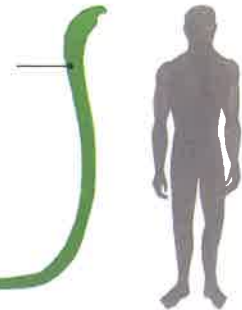
Although its numbers may have been reduced by the loss of habitat in some parts of its range, the king cobra is not endangered.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE KING COBRA

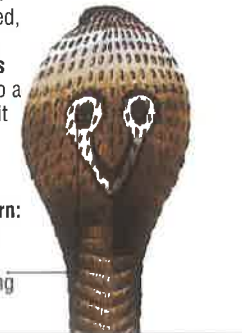


Specialized salivary glands: Located behind eyes. Secrete venom. When snake bites, venom is forced through fangs and into wound.

Height: Under threat, king cobra can raise itself up to one-third of its length. In some cases, this can make it taller than average man.



Hood: If cobra feels threatened, it will rear up, flatten out ribs of its neck into a hood, and emit high-pitched hiss.



Eyespot pattern: Found only on Indian cobra. Acts as warning to predators.



The king cobra is the longest of all the venomous snakes, and its bite is lethal. It has been known to kill a person in 15 minutes, but despite this, the king cobra is really a shy, secretive animal and will avoid a fight if it can.



BREEDING

The king cobra sheds its skin at the beginning of the breeding season, and in the female, molting triggers the release of a scent called a pheromone that attracts the male to her. The male entwines his body around the female while they mate, and the pair may stay locked together for hours.

Male and female cobras are thought to pair for life, which is unusual in snakes, and they cooperate to find a nest site. The female lays 20 to 50 white eggs in a hollow in the nest's center while the male guards against predators.

A newly hatched king cobra is glossy black with pale yellow stripes, and measures about 20 inches long. It can hunt almost immediately.

Above left: All cobra species, including the Indian cobra shown here, emit highly poisonous venom.

HABITS

The king cobra is numerous in the dense highland forests of southern Asia and has been found living at 6,500 feet above sea level in the mountains of India. It is active day and night, but is rarely seen.

The king cobra seems to prefer living near water, and if disturbed, it will often make its escape by slipping into a nearby stream and swimming away. It is also a good climber and can pursue its prey into the trees if necessary.

Left: The king cobra lives in forest areas, gliding silently through the undergrowth.

FOOD & HUNTING

The king cobra is a dangerous adversary. It will even attack pythons and highly venomous snake species, such as the krait and other cobras, and large lizards. It smells with its forked tongue, which it uses to track the scent of its prey through the dense forest undergrowth. When the cobra gets close to its prey, it relies on its eyesight to spot its victim before striking and subduing it with a massive dose of venom.

Having poisoned its victim, the cobra swallows it while it is still struggling—this can be a lengthy process. To make swallowing prey easier, the cobra's lower jaws are composed of two independent bones that are loosely attached to its skull; this allows the snake to swallow an animal that is thicker than its own head.



The prey is slowly drawn into the cobra's stomach by alternate movements of the snake's two lower jawbones, while the snake's skin stretches to accommodate the bulk. Swallowing large prey can take many hours, but the

Above: The king cobra is one of the few snakes that kills other snakes. It swallows its prey whole.

cobra will not eat again for several weeks.

Interestingly, the king cobra will often share its sleeping quarters with potential prey.

DID YOU KNOW?

- A king cobra can inject enough venom to kill a fully grown Indian elephant within three hours, provided it bites a sensitive spot, such as the tip of the trunk.
- Because of its slow metabolic rate, the king cobra can survive for months without eating at all.
- Snakes are deaf to most sounds, but they are sensitive to vibrations conducted through the ground and are easily frightened away by heavy footsteps.
- In Burma, king cobras are used in snake-charming acts.

KING COBRA & MAN

The king cobra's half-inch-long fangs are capable of delivering more venom than those of any other snake except the gaboon viper.

The king cobra is most aggressive when it is guarding its eggs. In India, if a nest is

found near a village, the area will often be evacuated.

Nevertheless, stories of enraged king cobras are probably exaggerated. A king cobra with no eggs to defend will usually disappear into the undergrowth if approached.



Left: The king cobra's venom attacks the nervous system. The victim suffers pain, blurred vision, and dizziness. In 15 minutes, the victim could well die.

SNAPPING TURTLE

CARD 7

GROUP 3: REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

CLASS
Reptilia

ORDER
Chelonia

FAMILY
Chelydridae

GENUS & SPECIES
Chelydra serpentina



The snapping turtle, or snapper, is well named, for it will attack anything that comes within range of its powerful jaws, including baby alligators.

KEY FACTS



SIZES
Length: Shell, up to 16 in.; overall length up to 32 in. Males are slightly smaller.
Weight: Up to 50 lb.



BREEDING:
Sexual maturity: Males, 3-5 years. Females, 4-6 years.
Breeding season: Summer.
No. of eggs: About 24.
Incubation: 2-3 months. Eggs laid late may not hatch until spring.



LIFESTYLE
Habit: Solitary.
Diet: Fish, small birds and mammals, frogs, salamanders, water snakes, smaller turtles, baby alligators.
Lifespan: Up to 60 years.



RELATED SPECIES
The alligator snapper, *Macrochelys temmincki* and the Florida snapper are close relatives.



■ Range of the snapping turtle.

DISTRIBUTION

Shallow, freshwater lakes, ponds, and rivers along eastern North America from southern Canada down to Central America and northwestern South America.

CONSERVATION

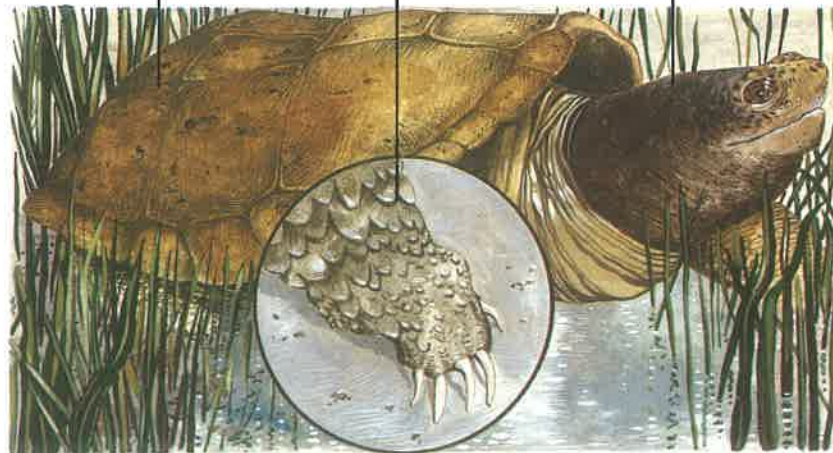
Man is the snapping turtle's main enemy, killing it for food and sport. Still, its numbers remain constant.

FEATURES OF THE SNAPPING TURTLE

Shell: The snapping turtle's shell is small and does not cover its head, limbs, and tail.

Front limbs: Strong, sharp claws on the front limbs rip prey into pieces when it is too large to be swallowed whole.

Head: Covered with thick, horny scales, the turtle's head cannot be retracted into the shell.



Mouth: Instead of teeth, the snapper's powerful jaws are equipped with a hooked, razor-sharp beak for slicing easily through flesh and bones of fish, water birds, amphibians, and reptiles.

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The snapping turtle is much different from the aquarium turtles kept as pets.

Powerfully built, the snapper has strong claws and a hooked beak so sharp it can bite through a man's hand.

BREEDING

Mating usually takes place in the water. In early summer, 25 to 50 eggs are laid and covered in a hole dug on land. Hatching usually takes two to three months, but eggs laid late in the season may not hatch until the next spring.

After hatching, baby snappers make their way down to the water, where they will spend their first few years. They grow quickly and often reach 6 inches in shell length in their first year. Males are fully grown and ready to breed between ages 3 and 5; females mature later.

Right: A snapper stands guard over its newly laid eggs before covering them with soil.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Snappers were once used to find dead bodies in lakes. Tethered to a rope, the snapper was released into the water. When the reptile stopped moving, the trackers knew it must have found a body and begun to feed.
- The alligator snapper has a small, worm-shaped appendage at the base of its mouth that it can move at will. It sits, open-mouthed, at the bottom of a lake waiting for small fish, which are attracted to the "worm."
- In some areas of Thailand, turtles are covered in gold leaf and kept in temples.

HABITS

Snapping turtles spend most of their time underwater, lying at the bottom of shallow freshwater lakes, ponds, and slow-moving rivers. In the northern part of their range, snappers hibernate underwater during cold weather.

Snapping turtles become extremely aggressive when they are confronted on land, and attack is their best method of defense. When threatened, snappers raise their bodies and lunge fiercely at the intruder.

FOOD & HUNTING

Snappers prey on almost anything they can catch and overpower. They eat fish, frogs, salamanders, smaller turtles, water snakes, baby alligators, and small, aquatic mammals.

Large prey is seized in the snapper's jaws and then torn

to pieces. Smaller prey is swallowed whole. Snappers also scavenge for food and will feed on the carcass of any dead animal found in the water. Young snappers feed on small fish, tadpoles, and aquatic insects.



Left: Awkward creatures on land, snapping turtles spend almost all of their time in the water. They even mate there.



Left: A snapper eating a sunfish. The turtles catch what they can but will also take the remains of another animal's kill if they come across it.

Right: The fearsome jaws and hooked beak of the snapper.



GREEN TURTLE

CARD 6

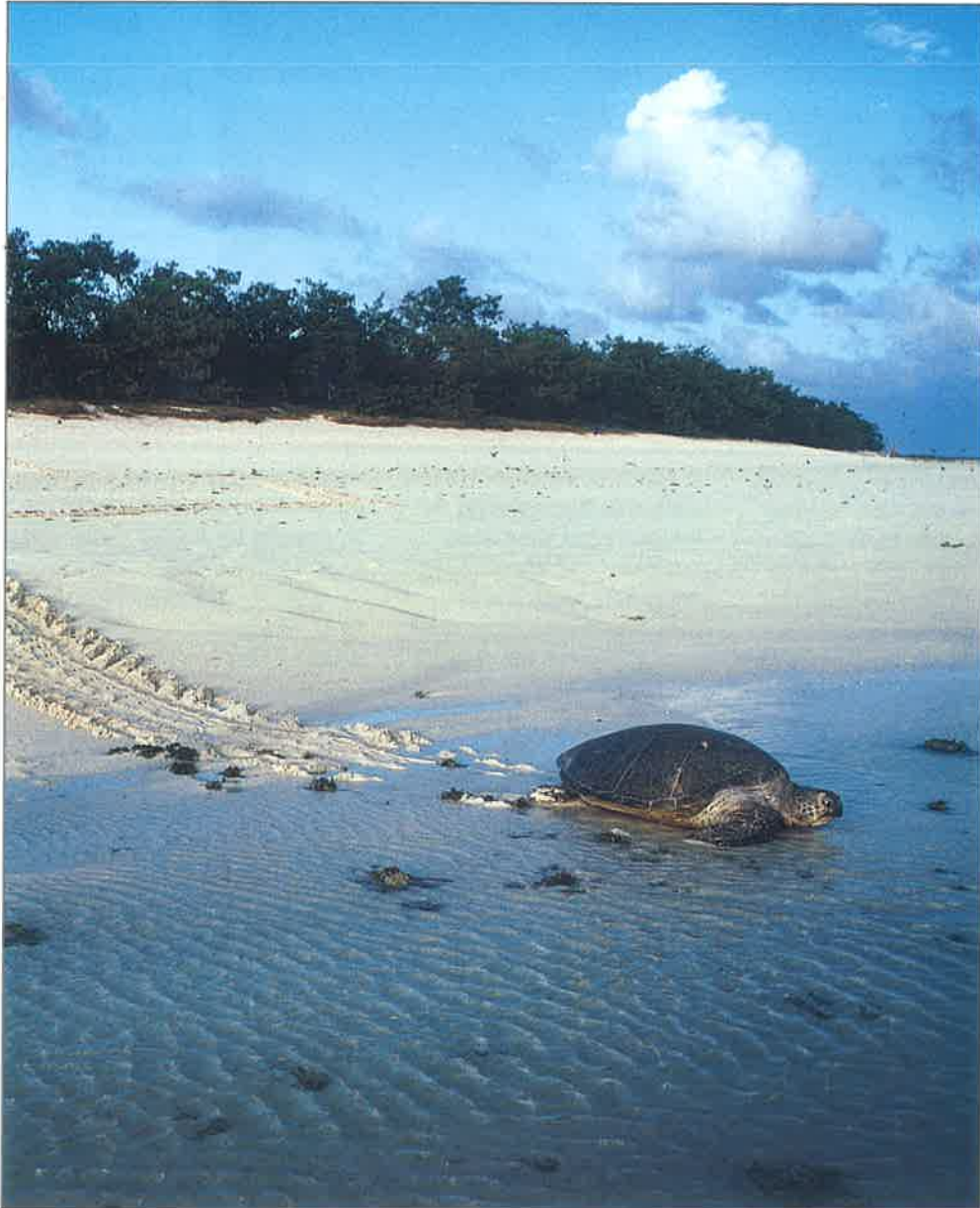
GROUP 3: REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

CLASS
Reptilia

ORDER
Testudines

FAMILY
Cheloniidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Chelonia mydas



One of the largest of the seven species of sea turtle, the green turtle used to be common throughout the warmer seas of the world. Today its numbers are a fraction of what they once were.

KEY FACTS



SIZES
Length: Up to 5 ft.
Weight: Up to 400 lb.



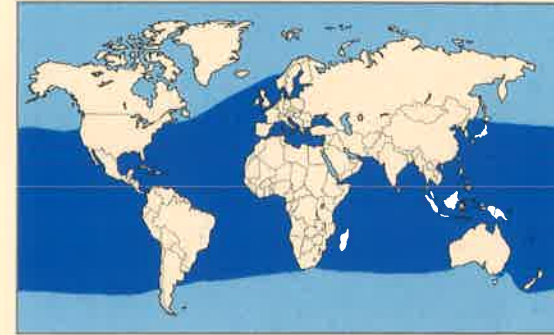
BREEDING
Sexual maturity: 10-15 years.
Breeding season: October to February.
Gestation period: 7-10 weeks.
No. of eggs: Approximately 100 each batch. Several batches laid over a few weeks.
Hatching time: 2-3 months.



LIFESTYLE
Habit: Usually solitary, except for nesting females and their young.
Diet: Crustaceans and fish when young. Adults eat plants only.
Lifespan: 40-50 years.



RELATED SPECIES
There are seven species of sea turtle, the largest being the leatherback, which grows to over 6 ft. in length.



Range of the green turtle.

DISTRIBUTION

Found throughout the warmer oceans and the Mediterranean. Most important rookeries or nesting beaches are Tortuguero in Costa Rica, Aves Island in the Caribbean, and Ascension Island in the mid-Atlantic.

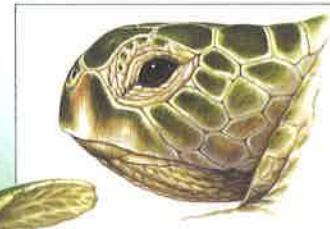
CONSERVATION

Despite legal protection, green turtles are still hunted and are missing from much of their former range.

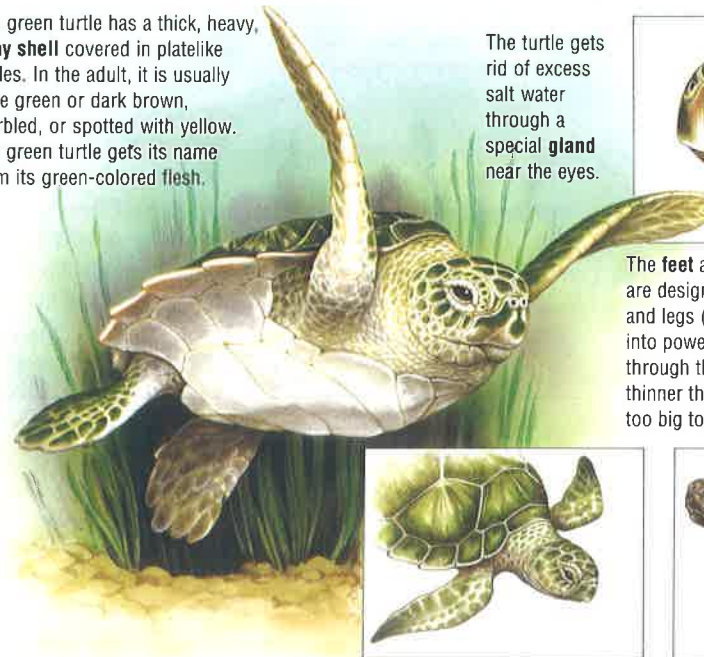
FEATURES OF THE GREEN TURTLE

The green turtle has a thick, heavy, **bony shell** covered in platelike scales. In the adult, it is usually olive green or dark brown, marbled, or spotted with yellow. The green turtle gets its name from its green-colored flesh.

The turtle gets rid of excess salt water through a special **gland** near the eyes.



The **feet and legs** of the tortoise (below) are designed for walking. The turtle's feet and legs (below left) have been modified into powerful **flippers** that propel it through the water. The turtle's **shell** is thinner than that of the tortoise. Its head is too big to be withdrawn into the shell.





Like most turtles, the green turtle has been hunted to the brink of extinction by man for its flesh, eggs, and shell. It spends almost its entire life in the sea. The females leave the water for only a short time every other year to lay their eggs.

HABITAT

The green turtle likes warm, shallow waters which allow for an abundant growth of sea grass—its favorite food. Those turtles found far out to sea, where the water is very deep, are on their way to or

from their nesting beaches.

The turtle can swim at great speeds underwater. It must surface to breathe, but an adult can stay submerged for five hours. Young turtles surface more frequently.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The nesting beaches, called rookeries, on Ascension Island are so popular with green turtles that the entire island is covered with them during the breeding season.
- The sex of hatchling sea

turtles is determined by their incubation temperature. At 82° F, hatchlings are all male; at 90° F they are all female.

- Just one or two out of 100 turtles born will survive their first year.

BREEDING

Mating takes place on the water's surface. Several nights later, the female hauls herself onto the beach and digs a large hole with her front flippers, where she lays approximately 100 hard-shelled eggs, each the size of a ping-pong ball. She then pushes the sand back into the hole to cover the eggs and returns to the sea.

Over the next few weeks, the female will lay several batches of eggs. They hatch during the night two to three months later. The tiny turtles dig their way to the surface. They then make their way to the sea.



Far left: Although awkward on land, the green turtle is a graceful swimmer.

Left: Even mating takes place at sea.



Far left: The eggs are laid at night in a hole dug out above the high-tide mark.

Left: Hatching takes place at night.

FOOD & FEEDING

Fully grown turtles eat only plant matter. Their favorite food is sea grass, sometimes called eel grass, as well as algae. In the Galápagos Islands, green turtles are known to feed on mangrove leaves overhanging the water. Turtles have very sharp jaws that cut through tough, fibrous vegetation.

Green turtle hatchlings have a more varied diet; they feed on fish, crustaceans, jellyfish, and algae. During their first few months, the young turtles are poor swimmers, so they tend to float along on beds of sargassum weed. Tiny crabs and shrimp provide a primary food source for the young.

As they grow, the turtles become increasingly plant-eating. They locate vegetation with the use of their excellent underwater eyesight.

MIGRATION

Male and female turtles migrate to the same beaches every season to lay their eggs. They often return to the very beach where they were hatched themselves.

The migration may be short

in duration, although many of the turtles feeding along the Brazilian coast swim a distance of 2,800 miles against the current to Ascension Island in the mid-Atlantic.

On the island, the eggs are

relatively well protected. On the Brazilian mainland, many animals dig up and eat turtle eggs, but the only predators on Ascension Island are frigate birds, which eat a small proportion of the hatchlings.



Left: A lone baby turtle makes its way to the sea.

Right: Newborn turtles head for deep water.

Right: On their long migrations, turtles can swim long distances underwater, staying submerged for periods of up to five hours.



BLACK MAMBA

CARD 4

GROUP 3: REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS



ORDER
Squamata

FAMILY
Elapidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Dendroaspis polylepis



The black mamba is the fastest snake in the world, able to reach speeds of almost 15 miles per hour. Its deadly venom makes it feared by both humans and animals in its African homeland.

KEY FACTS



SIZES

Length: Maximum, 13 ft.
Average, about 10 ft.
Weight: Up to 3½ lb.



BREEDING

Sexual maturity: Unknown.
Breeding season: Spring to early summer.
No. of eggs: 6-15; white with leathery, supple shell.



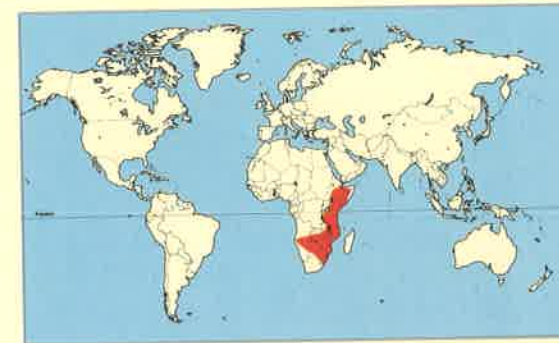
LIFESTYLE

Habit: Solitary.
Diet: Rodents, bats, other small mammals, birds, and lizards.
Venom: Nerve poison causing death by suffocation.
Lifespan: Up to 12 years in captivity. Probably much less in the wild.



RELATED SPECIES

Related to the green mamba, *Dendroaspis angusticeps*, which is smaller and less poisonous.



Range of the black mamba.

DISTRIBUTION

The black mamba is found in eastern and southern Africa. Its closest relative, the green mamba, is found in eastern and central Africa.

CONSERVATION

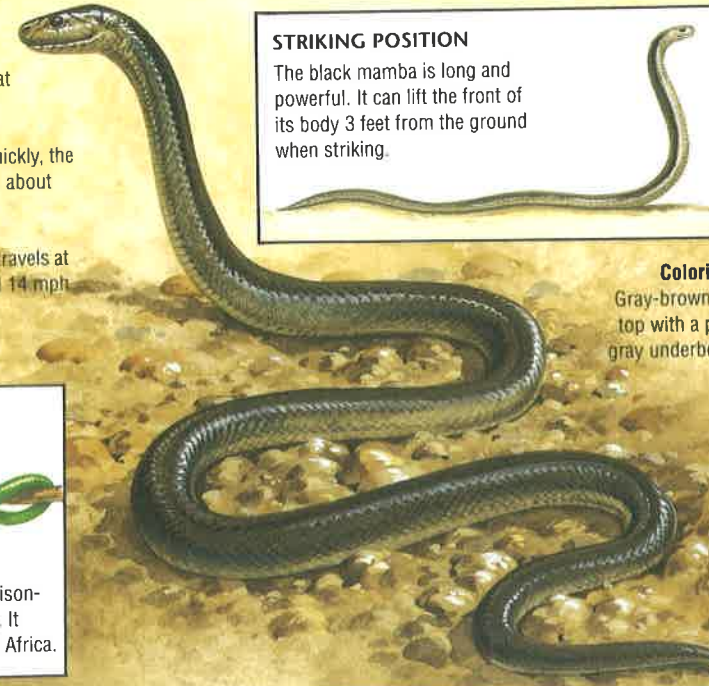
The black mamba is in no danger of extinction within its range as long as its habitat is not disturbed.

FEATURES OF THE BLACK MAMBA

Jaws: The lower jaw can be temporarily dislocated so the snake can swallow prey that is larger than its own head.

Posture: Even when moving quickly, the black mamba can hold its head about 20 inches off the ground.

Speed: Over long distances it travels at about 7 mph, but it can exceed 14 mph in short bursts.



STRIKING POSITION

The black mamba is long and powerful. It can lift the front of its body 3 feet from the ground when striking.

Coloring: Gray-brown on top with a pale gray underbelly.

GREEN MAMBA



Smaller, shyer, and less poisonous than the black mamba. It lives in eastern and central Africa.



to strike quickly and its highly toxic venom make the black mamba Africa's deadliest snake. For this reason it inspires fear and respect in those who share its habitat.

Right: Long, lithe, and muscular, the black mamba climbs quickly and easily through low branches. It is occasionally mistaken for a tree snake.

FOOD & HUNTING

The black mamba feeds frequently. It hunts rodents, bats, other small mammals, birds, and lizards. Using its fangs, it strikes accurately and with lightning speed. It has excellent eyesight and can lift its head and front over three feet off the ground when striking.

The snake injects its deadly venom through two hollow fangs at the front of its mouth. The venom attacks the nervous system and quickly suffocates the victim. Enzymes in the snake's saliva and venom begin to digest the prey before it has reached the stomach. Within a few hours, the prey is completely digested.



The black mamba is a long and dangerous snake from eastern and southern Africa. It can move faster than any other snake through thick undergrowth or over open ground. It also takes readily to trees. This snake strikes its prey quickly and accurately, even when it is moving fast.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The black mamba is the fastest snake in the world, reaching over 14 miles per hour over short distances.
- The black mamba can digest an animal the size of a large rat within nine hours.
- The black mamba is dark-

skinned to absorb the sun's heat. Desert-dwelling snakes are paler to reflect heat and prevent overheating.

- The venom of both the black and the green mamba is "milked" from their fangs and used in medical research.



Left: The black mamba is really gray-brown. Its relative, the green mamba, is shorter and less aggressive but still deadly.

HABITS

The black mamba spends its day basking in the sun or hunting. When hunting, the snake travels quickly over the ground or along tree branches. Strong and muscular, it can hold its head 20 inches off the ground even when moving.

At night the black mamba returns to a discarded burrow in the ground or to a deep hiding place among rocks or fallen trees. When frightened, it rushes to this hole, attacking whatever blocks its path.

The black mamba needs warmth to activate its body and lies on flat rocks or low branches during the day to soak up the sun's heat. During the hottest months, it may return to its hole at midday.

The black mamba periodically sheds the outer layer of its skin as it grows. This *sloughing* occurs every two months or so, beginning shortly after hatching. Young snakes grow more quickly and slough more often than older ones.



BREEDING

Breeding occurs in spring and early summer. A male may travel far to find a mate, but after mating each snake returns to its own hole.

The female lays from 6 to 15 white eggs in decaying vegetation or a rotting tree stump. The decomposing nest gives off heat, which warms the eggs and speeds up the hatching time. Each egg has a pliable shell that allows water

and oxygen to reach the developing embryo.

The hatchlings are about 20 inches long and gray-green in color, but they darken with age. They are born independent and can catch prey about the size of a mouse. The young grow quickly, reaching more than six feet in their first year.

Young black mambas are preyed upon by the mongoose and the snake-eating snake. Adults fall victim to the secretary bird and large eagles.

Left: A hatchling emerges from its egg ready to catch its own prey.

NILE CROCODILE

CARD 3

GROUP 3: REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

ORDER
Crocodylia

FAMILY
Crocodylidae

GENUS & SPECIES
Crocodylus niloticus



The Nile crocodile is the largest crocodile in Africa and one of the largest in the world. Up to 20 feet long and more than 1,500 pounds, it is a deadly predator of both animals and people.

KEY FACTS



SIZES

Length: Up to 20 ft., head to tip of tail.

Weight: Up to 1,650 lb.



BREEDING

Sexual maturity: 6-7 years.

Breeding season: July.

No. of eggs: 30-70.

Incubation: 3 months.



LIFESTYLE

Habit: Solitary or in small groups of similarly sized animals to avoid being preyed upon by larger crocodiles.

Diet: Mammals, reptiles (including other crocodiles), birds, fish, and carrion.

Lifespan: Estimated 70-100 years.



RELATED SPECIES

There are 22 species of crocodile found throughout the tropical and subtropical areas of Asia, Australia, and North America.



■ Range of the Nile crocodile.

DISTRIBUTION

Found throughout Africa, from Egypt in the north to South Africa. It is absent from the cooler parts of North Africa and the dry Sahara desert.

CONSERVATION

Still quite numerous throughout most of its range, but most other crocodile species are severely threatened due to overhunting for their skins and meat.

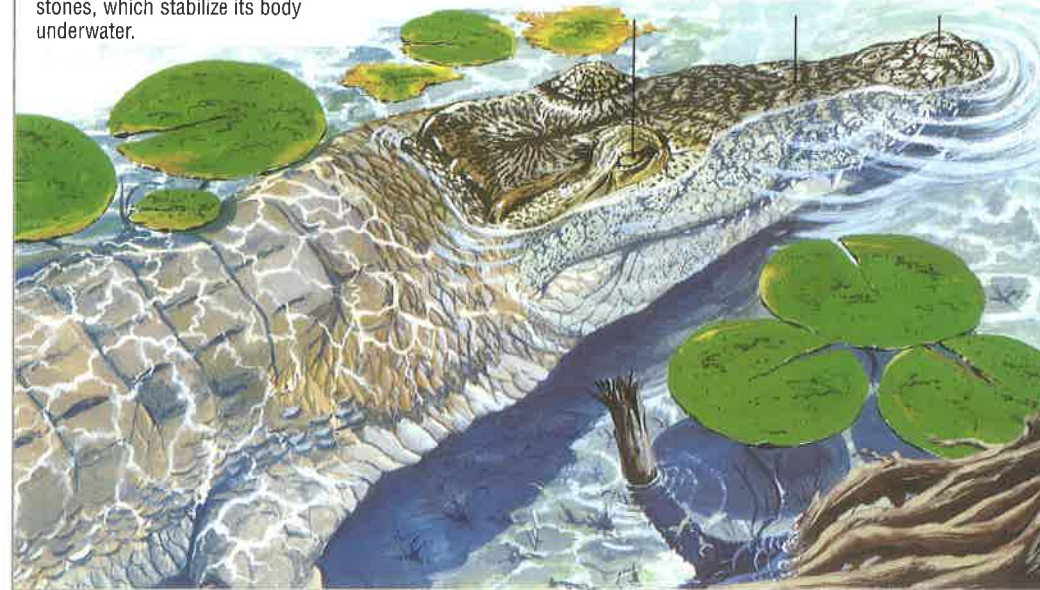
UNDERWATER LIFE OF THE NILE CROCODILE

The Nile crocodile's eyes, nostrils, and ears all lie along the top of its head so that it can see, hear, smell, and breathe when submerged. Its stomach is full of stones, which stabilize its body underwater.

The **eye** has a third eyelid that gives protection when diving.

The long **snout** is armed with sharp, cone-shaped teeth.

Special **muscles** enable the nostrils to close when diving.



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