

The Living Dragon

Dragons are mythical creatures with slender heads, a body like a dinosaur and a long tail like a lizard. What makes a dragon unique is its ability to spew fire from its mouth or nostrils. Dragons have been the stuff of legends for centuries and contemporary graphic artists enjoy drawing dragons.

Do you know that there is a real dragon living on earth today just like it has been for millions of years? While it doesn't breathe fire or rear up ten feet tall, this ancient lizard lives much like it has since prehistoric times. The Komodo dragon was discovered only about a century ago on the remote Indonesian Islands of Komodo, Gila Motang, Rinca, and Flores near the equator between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. The Komodo dragon is an endangered species; there are only 3,000 to 5,000 left. They are known to live about thirty years.



The adult Komodo dragon is a huge creature, growing to a length of ten feet and a weight of more than 300 pounds. They are the heaviest of all lizard species. They are carnivores that prey on other animals like wild pigs, deer and even water buffalo which also inhabit the islands. A Komodo dragon can eat as much as eighty percent of its body weight in a single feeding! The Komodo dragon is a reptile and, like its cousins the alligator and crocodile, the dragon has powerful legs and jaws as well as sharp claws and teeth well-suited for larger prey. The Komodo dragon can run up to eighteen miles per hour over a short distance.

The Komodo dragon doesn't need to run after swift prey like wild pigs and deer. While alligators and crocodiles lie in wait for prey in the water, the Komodo dragon camouflages itself on land and uses its powerful legs to lunge at passing animals. If the prey is not caught in the sharp teeth and powerful jaws, it will quickly die from the dragon's bite. Komodo dragon saliva contains over fifty kinds of bacteria that, while harmless to the dragon, will kill another animal within twenty-four hours. The dragon uses its keen sense of smell and simply follows the trail to its next meal.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. The Komodo dragon is a
 - a. Reptile
 - b. Lizard
 - c. Both a. and b. above
 - d. None of the above

2. The Komodo dragon lives
 - a. On islands in Indonesia
 - b. On the equator
 - c. Between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean
 - d. All of the above

3. How many pounds does the average adult Komodo dragon weigh?
 - a. 30
 - b. 300
 - c. 3,000
 - d. More than 3,000

4. A Komodo dragon will NOT eat
 - a. Wild pig
 - b. Deer
 - c. Water buffalo
 - d. None of the above

5. The Komodo dragon can kill prey through bacteria
 - a. In its saliva
 - b. In its claws
 - c. On its teeth
 - d. On its skin

6. Which of the following statements is true?
 - a. The Komodo dragon can run fast for a long distance.
 - b. The Komodo dragon can run fast for a short distance.
 - c. The Komodo dragon never runs fast.
 - d. The Komodo dragon runs fast to avoid prey.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Short Answer Questions

1. Where does the Komodo dragon live? Find this location on a map.
2. Describe the physical features of the Komodo dragon.
3. Explain the relationship of the Komodo dragon to alligators and crocodiles.
4. Describe the unique way that a Komodo dragon can kill prey.
5. Find all the similes in this reading.
6. The word "contemporary" occurs in this reading. What does it mean? If you don't know, look it up in a dictionary.
7. Why do you think that scientists discovered the Komodo dragon only about one hundred years ago?
8. Based on the information in this reading, how many pounds of food can a Komodo dragon eat at one meal?