



Think like a Herpetologist... a scientist who studies reptiles and amphibians



Language of the Discipline:

Amphibian: A group of vertebrates whose reproductive biology is closely tied to water. Includes frogs, toads, newts and salamanders

Aquatic: Growing, living or found in water.

Arboreal: A creature which spends most of its time in trees or bushes.

Autotomy: The ability to drop or shed the tail as a defense mechanism.

Beak: Hard or bony mouthparts on chelonians and some tadpoles

Bifurcated: Notched in two, such as a snake's tongue. Iguana tongues have a small, deep pink notch in the tip, often only visible once the iguana has reached a year or so of age.

Brumation: Torpor induced by prolonged periods of low temperatures.

Caruncle: Egg tooth, used by oviparous species to cut a slit in their shell through which they will push their way out.

Chelonia: The reptile group comprised of turtles, terrapins and tortoises.

Cloaca: A passage used for eliminating fecal, urinary and reproductive discharges. From the Latin word meaning "sewer".

Crest: A decorative ridge of skin or spikes that may occur on the neck, back and/or tail.

Dewlap: The flap of skin on the throat of some lizards such as iguanas and anoles.

Diurnal: A creature which is predominantly active during the day.

Ectothermic- A creature that cannot regulate its own body temperature, rather it's regulated by the environment, so they often bask for heat, burrow, and hibernate.

Endoskeleton: The internal structure or skeleton of an invertebrate

Estivation: Similar to hibernation. Some reptiles will bury themselves and remain dormant when the climate is too dry and/or hot for comfort.

Herptile: Any reptile or amphibian.

Newt: small, usually bright-colored semi-aquatic salamanders of North America, Europe and North Asia.

Nocturnal: A creature which is active at night.

Pipping: The breaking open of an egg shell by the hatchling inside. Most hatchlings are equipped with an "egg tooth," a sharp protruberance on their mouth, used to pierce and cut a tear in the shell.

Plastron: The bottom part of a turtle or tortoise shell.

Reptiles: Snakes, lizards, turtles, tortoises, alligators and crocodiles. Many scientists believe that the dinosaurs of prehistoric time were reptiles.

Salamanders: amphibians that have slender bodies, short legs, and long tails. They are often mistaken for lizards. Unlike lizards, they have smooth moist skin (not scales) and they do not have claws on the toes of their feet.

Semi-aquatic: A creature which spends part of its time on land and also lives in the water.

Shedding: The term used to describe the molting of a snake or lizards skin.

Spawn: The eggs of amphibians.

Tadpoles: The larval form of an amphibian's life cycle.

Terrapin: Fresh-water tortoise.

Terrestrial: A creature which predominantly lives on the land.

Thermoregulate: In reptiles, their ability to change their body temperature by moving from warm to cool places.

Thigmothem(ic): Absorbs heat by laying/resting against warm objects in the environment. Commonly found in snakes, Lacertidae, Scincidae, and Teiidae. Snakes use a combination of heliothermic and thigmothemic strategies.

Torpor: Sluggishness, inactive, lethargic.

Resource: Kaplan, Melissa. 1995. Glossary of Herp & Related Terms from the website: Herp and Green Iguana Information Collection. <http://www.anapsid.org/resources/glossary.html>