The Tongo Lizard

The Tongo lizard belongs to the reptile family: there are over 4,500 species of lizard in the wild. They are very rare as they are an endangered species due to poaching, which was most prevalent in the 1990s. They only live in hot countries such as; Mexico, Somalia and India. They are very much like the Komodo dragon, the reason being is because they are in fact related.

What does the Tongo lizard look like?

This unique creature has chameleon-like qualities and can change its scaly skin to match its surroundings: this camouflage is its main defence mechanism. Its long tail, which can grow to be a foot long, has a single spike protruding from the end. Its eyes, which are sensitive to UV light, are lilac in colour with its pupils varying from green to red (depending on its mood). The male lizard, which is smaller than the female, is brightly coloured most of the time in order to attract a mate for breeding. They have four webbed feet, which have suction cups underneath so that they can climb trees.

Where does the Tongo lizard live?

The Tongo lizard lives in a multitude of habitats due to its adaptive qualities: as long as the temperature is hot the Tongo lizard will survive. In tropical areas it will create burrows in the undergrowth: shielding it from predators. In sub-Saharan regions it will cover itself in sand. This means most countries will be inhabited by these amazing creatures!

What does the Tongo lizard eat?

The Tongo lizard is omnivorous (meaning it eats both plants and meat). It mostly feasts on small grubs found on forest floors and within sandy dunes: this supplies the lizard with most of its protein. It has sharp talons, which are great for tearing apart its prey. It will also munch on fallen, decaying leaves. Before being an omnivore it was in fact a herbivore and so it actually adapted to its environment over hundreds of years. It has an acidic tummy which sucks all the nutrients it needs out of its food. In addition to this, its tummy can adapt in size for when food is in short supply.

Why is the Tongo lizard endangered?

The Tongo lizard is endangered for a multitude of reasons but the most prolific reason is poaching. In recent years, the Tongo lizard population has declined in Africa and India, mostly due to its skin being sold on the black market. Whereas in Mexico, the numbers are soaring as the government have launched an initiative to protect the species and encourage breeding within zoos. The female Tongo can lay an average of 8 eggs, when they're fully grown and often live in groups of 10-25. It takes around 3 years until they are an adult however they only have a lifespan of 10 years.

How does the creature defend itself?

The lizard is very adept at defending itself against its predators: which include mammals such as tigers and also snakes. As aforementioned it is able to change its skin to camouflage itself: which enables the lizard to travel for miles without being spotted. It has a protruding spike at the end of its tail, which it will move from left to right if threatened. Because of its aerodynamic body it is able to run extremely fast: being able to reach 10mph in just 3 seconds. If a predator does capture a Tongo lizard, it will release its tail from its body: hoping the predator will then be distracted by the severed limb in order for it to escape. Not to worry though as the lizard has regenerative genes and can grow its tail back within a few short months.

Other features of the Tongo lizard

A little known fact about these incredible animals is that it is a very graceful and agile swimmer: it's able to reach a speed of 15mph whilst in water as it skims the surface for bursts at a time. As they are reptiles and therefore cold-blooded: this species need to spend hours basking in the sun to maintain their body temperature. If you want to find out more about the Tongo Lizard then you can visit the Tongo Lizard Society website at www.tongolizardsociety.com