

Reptiles of the Wet Tropics

The concentration of endemic reptiles in the Wet Tropics is greater than in any other area of Australia. About 162 species of reptiles live in this region and 24 of these species live exclusively in the rainforest. Eighteen of them are found nowhere else in the world. Many lizards are closely related to species in New Guinea and South-East Asia. The ancestors of two of the resident geckos are thought to date back millions of years to the ancient super continent of Gondwana.

PRICKLY FOREST SKINK - *Gnypetoscincus queenlandiae*

Length to 17cm. This skink is distinguished by its very prickly back scales. It is very hard to see, as it is nocturnal and hides under rotting logs and is extremely heat sensitive. Located in the rainforest in the Wet Tropics only, from near Cooktown to west of Cardwell.



RAINFOREST SKINK - *Eulamprus tigrinus*

Length to 16cm. The body has irregular, broken black bars. They give birth to live young and feed on invertebrates. Predominantly arboreal, they bask in patches of sunlight in the rainforest and shelter in tree hollows at night. Apparently capable of producing a sharp squeak when handled or when fighting. It is rare and found only in rainforests from south of Cooktown to west of Cardwell.



NORTHERN RED-THROATED SKINK - *Carlia rubrigularis*

Length to 14cm. The sides of the neck are richly flushed with red in breeding males. Lays 1-2 eggs per clutch, sometimes communally. Forages for insects in leaf litter, fallen logs and tree buttresses. May also prey on small skinks and own species. Routinely exhibits tail-waving behaviour while foraging. Found in rainforests from Cooktown to near Townsville.



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RING-TAILED GECKO - *Cyrtodactylus lousiadensis*

Length to about 30cm. The original tail is boldly banded, but regrown tails are not. The feet are bird-like with long slender digits and claws. A large, voracious gecko found in open forest and rainforest margins, especially in rocky areas, from Mount Molloy to the McIlwraith Range (Cape York) and in the Louisiade Archipelago, New Guinea.



NORTHERN LEAF-TAILED GECKO - *Saltuarius cornutus*

Length to 23cm. It has spindly limbs, sharp-clawed toes and a very flat body with lichen-like blotches. Arboreal, it forages at night for insects among protective foliage where it is well camouflaged. Lays 1-2 eggs. Australia's largest gecko, it is very specialised (like the Chameleon Gecko) and may have evolved from Gondwanan ancestors. Found only in rainforest from near Cooktown to Paluma, Qld.



RUSTY MONITOR - *Varanus semiremex*

Full length to about 60cm. It feeds on fish, crabs, insects and lizards. The tongue is deeply forked like that of a snake and is flicked in and out to 'taste' (or rather smell) for prey. It is diurnal and commonly found living in mangroves, coastal and inland swamps, mainly in Tropical North Queensland.



LEGLSS LIZARD - *Delma mitella*

Largest of its genus with a length to 75cm. It is closely related to geckos and occurs only in Australia and New Guinea. They have no forelimbs and only flap-like hindlimbs. A rare and poorly known species, they most likely feed on insects and lay 2 eggs per clutch. Found only at a few rainforest edge sites on the eastern side of Atherton Tableland and Paluma.



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BOYDS FOREST DRAGON - *Hypsilurus boydii*

Length to 45cm. This ancient reptile evolved in Australia 15-20 million years ago. Unlike most other dragons, they do not thermoregulate and their body temperature reflects the ambient temperature. They lay 1-5 eggs in shallow burrows, often next to roadsides. They mainly feed on ants, beetles, spiders, grasshoppers and earthworms. Found only in the rainforest from south of Cooktown to Paluma.



SAW-SHELLED TURTLE - *Elseya latisternum*

Broadly oval shell grows to 28cm. The hind edge of the shell is strongly serrated in hatchlings but reduced or lost in adults. Feeds on aquatic insects, molluscs, crustaceans, fish, tadpoles, frogs, and the cane toad. Found in rivers and streams along the coast from Cape York to northern NSW and was introduced to Lake Eacham on the Atherton Tablelands.



GREEN TURTLE - *Chelonia mydas*

Length to 1m. It is distinguished by the smooth and semicircular shell. Although carnivorous when young, adults are thought to be almost entirely herbivorous. They lay about 100 round eggs on mainland and island beaches. They forage in open lagoons and around reefs and are common along the tropical coasts of Australia and the Great Barrier Reef, but are threatened throughout their international range.



FRILLED LIZARD - *Chlamydosaurus kingii*

Length to 66cm. When alarmed, this dragon runs on hind legs with frill erect displaying its yellow mouth lining. Reminiscent of dinosaur ancestors, the large frill is also used to regulate its body temperature. Feeds on insects and small vertebrates. Found in open forest and woodland around Cooktown, Mareeba, Mount Molloy, and across northern and eastern Australia to Brisbane.



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ESTUARINE CROCODILE - *Crocodylus porosus*

The estuarine crocodile is an ancient species which can live up to 100 years, but many of the oldest crocodiles, which were up to 8.4m long, were hunted out by the 1970s. Also known as the saltwater crocodile, it was declared a vulnerable and protected species in Queensland in 1974, because many are killed in fishing nets across northern Queensland. Crocodiles are also affected by the loss of most of their breeding habitat to human development and nowadays it is rare to find any of them longer than 5m. It is distinguished from the freshwater crocodile by its size, broad snout, powerful tail for swimming and enlarged scales in two rows on the neck. Of the 23 species of crocodiles worldwide, this species is the most aggressive, yet the female exhibits the gentlest behaviour with her offspring. When her 50 or so eggs have hatched, she picks them up in her mouth and carries them carefully down to the water. They are found across northern Australia from the Kimberley region (WA) to Rockhampton (Qld), India and South-East Asia.

