

Name: _____

Reptiles and Amphibians

by Guy Belleranti

Take a look at the four animals pictures below. Do you know which ones are reptiles and which ones are amphibians?



The chameleon is an unusual lizard that can change the color of its scaly body. It has a long, sticky tongue for catching insects. It also has a prehensile¹ tail. Wild chameleons can be found in warm habitats in Europe, Africa, and Asia.



This red-eyed tree frog is from the rainforests of South America. When it hatched it was a tiny tadpole that breathed water like a fish. It grew into an adult frog that breathes air and climbs trees.



This spotted salamander looks like a lizard, but it's really not a lizard at all. It began its life living in water, but moved onto land as an adult. It hides in damp, wet places throughout the forests of North America.



This gharial is an animal from India. It is similar to an alligator or crocodile. Because its snout is long and slender, its bite is not as powerful as that of its alligator and crocodile cousins. It lives in rivers and hunts fish.

If you're someone who can't tell which are reptiles and which are amphibians, don't worry, you're not alone. People often confuse these two groups of vertebrates, so let's discuss the differences between them. With a little knowledge, you will quickly be able to spot the differences.

Reptiles include snakes, lizards, turtles, and crocodilians. Amphibians include frogs, toads, caecilians², salamanders and newts.

Reptiles usually lay eggs protected by a shell. (Some snakes, however, don't lay eggs, but have live young.) Amphibian eggs do not have a protective shell. They are soft and jelly-like.

¹ A **prehensile** body part is one that is used to grasp or hold things. The chameleon uses its tail to grasp branches or sticks.

² **Caecilians** are leg-less amphibians. They kind of look like earthworms or small snakes. They live in damp soil and in the rivers and streams of Africa, Asia and South America.

When a reptile hatches from its egg, it looks like a smaller version of the adult reptile. Its body doesn't change much as it grows. When an amphibian hatches, on the other hand, it doesn't look anything like an adult. Amphibians begin their life as larvae - usually tadpoles that swim in the water. When they get older they grow legs and transform into frogs, toads, caecilians, newts, or salamanders. These changes are called metamorphosis.

All reptiles have lungs to breathe air. Amphibians breathe air for only part of their lives. Amphibian larvae have gills to breath oxygen in water, like a fish. As they grow into adults, most amphibians form lungs so they can breathe air. Many adult amphibians also have special skin that allow them to absorb oxygen.

Have you ever seen a snake up close or touched one? Reptiles' skin is covered with waterproof scales. Have you ever seen a frog up close? You may have noticed that its skin is different from the snake's. The frog is an amphibian, so it's body is covered with skin that does not have scales. Frogs, salamanders, and newts all have smooth, wet skin. A toad's skin can be warty and dry.

Reptiles can live in many different types of habitats, whereas amphibians cannot. Reptiles can be found in temperate and tropical climates around the world. Some reptiles, like crocodiles and sea turtles, spend most of their lives in water. Others, like iguanas and rattlesnakes, can live in dry, hot deserts. Amphibians, on the other hand, usually spend most of their lives in damp places near water.

About the Author





Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with animals and teaching others.

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1. Complete the table.

				
Name of Animal Species	chameleon			
Reptile or Amphibian?		amphibian		

2. _____ is the change that an amphibian goes through as it develops from a larval tadpole to adult.

3. Define prehensile.

4. How can you tell the difference between a reptile's body and an amphibian's body, simply by looking closely at it?

5. Which is an example of amphibian larva?

- a. jelly-like egg
- b. egg with a protective shell
- c. adult salamander
- d. tadpole

6. If you wanted to see a spotted salamander in the wild, where might you look?

- a. in the desert, near cacti
- b. in a saltwater habitat
- c. beneath rocks near a marsh
- d. in a rocky, dry cave

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

_____ 1. rainforest

_____ 2. damp

_____ 3. cousins

_____ 4. knowledge

_____ 5. protected

_____ 6. prehensile

_____ 7. temperate

_____ 8. caecilians

a. kept away from harm

b. able to grasp objects

c. area with mild temperatures; in between the hottest and coldest parts of the Earth

d. hot, rainy habitat with lots of plant life

e. relatives

f. information that you learn

g. amphibians that have no legs and often live underground





h. slightly wet

ANSWER KEY

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1. Complete the table.

				
Name of Animal Species	chameleon	red-eyed tree frog	spotted salamander	gharial
Reptile or Amphibian?	reptile	amphibian	amphibian	reptile

2. **Metamorphosis** is the change that an amphibian goes through as it develops from a larval tadpole to adult.
3. Define prehensile.
A prehensile body part is one that is able to grasp objects.
4. How can you tell the difference between a reptile's body from an amphibian's body, simply by looking closely at it?
Reptiles' skin is covered with scales. Amphibians have a type of skin that does not have scales.
5. Which is an example of amphibian larva? **d**
- a. jelly-like egg b. egg with a protective shell
c. adult salamander d. **tadpole**
6. If you wanted to see a spotted salamander in the wild, where might you look? **c**
- a. in the desert, near cacti b. in a saltwater habitat
c. **beneath rocks near a marsh** d. in a rocky, dry cave

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