

Central Bearded Dragon

Pogona vitticeps

Interpreting With Lizards: Our job as interpreters is to link what the visitors are seeing to The Zoo's conservation education messages. Our goal is to spark curiosity, create emotional connections and inspire visitors to take action. The best way to achieve this goal is to share thematic information that connects to The Zoo's messaging. The theme of your conversations may differ from group to group depending on the program and the age of your audience. Some examples of talking points that relate to Zoo themes are listed below.

Theme: Animals have adaptations that help them survive.

Talking point: Adaptations for avoiding predations

- Related information:
 - Bearded dragons and geckos have adaptations that help them avoid predation.
 - Bearded dragon:
 - Their sandy coloration helps them camouflage with their environment.
 - Can stretch out “beard” to appear large and threatening.
 - Spikes appear pointy and sharp, making the animal seem like an unappealing meal.
 - Iranian eyelid gecko:
 - Like the bearded dragon, the gecko’s coloration helps them camouflage.
 - Geckos have plump tails that predators often mistake as the lizard’s head. When attacked by a predator, geckos are able to remove their tails without injury, and the tail will grow back.
- Call to action: Encourage visitors to observe other animal adaptations as they explore the rest of The Zoo.

Theme: Humans are part of the great diversity of life and have the power to protect or destroy it.

Talking point: Responsible pet ownership

Background: Many audience members may say that they want a lizard as a pet, or may tell you stories of taking them home. It is important to educate your audience about responsible pet ownership and wildlife interaction. Information to keep in mind is listed below.

Related information:

- Owning a pet is a big responsibility. It is important to research what an animal requires, and where it came from, before bringing one home.

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- Lizards can live for many years, require specific care at home, and some can grow very large.
- Always purchase your pet from a responsible breeder. The illegal pet trade is a major threat to many exotic species.
- Unwanted pets should never be released to the wild. The species may not be suited to their new environment, or they may thrive and cause problems for native species.

Lizards are reptiles

Reptiles are cold blooded, or *ectothermic*. This means that they rely on outside sources to heat and cool its body, such as sunlight or shade. Because a lizard spends less energy warming its body compared to a warm blooded, or *endothermic* animal, such as a human, it requires less food.

Lizards are a very diverse group of reptiles in terms of body shape and size, adaptations and habitats. For example, some move slowly and rely on camouflage for protection, whereas other species are highly mobile. Lizards have several characteristics that distinguish them from other reptiles:

- Four legs and a tail
- External ear openings
- Typically have moveable eyelids
- Lack a bony shell

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Description:

- Size: 13-24 in (33-61 cm) long including tail
- Weight: Up to 3.3 lb (1.5 kg)
- Physical description: A medium-small lizard with a stocky, triangular head. The head is lined with spikes, and a “fringe” of spikes runs down the side of the body and between the legs. The throat features an inflatable pouch that gives the animal its name. Tail is very long and may be half the total length of the body. The body itself is flattened and round, with numerous raised scales covering the back. The lower surface is generally smooth.
- Coloration: Color varies depending on the color of the soil from which the individual originates, but typically features a brown base color, ranging from dark brown to tan, with lighter markings, ranging from tan to orange, red, or gold.
- Sexual dimorphism: Males generally have larger heads, larger, darker beards, and larger femoral pores (waxy bumps on the underside of the back legs).

In the Wild

Habitat and Range:

- Geographic range: Found in central and eastern Australia.
- Habitat: Occupies a wide range of habitats including subtropical woodlands, scrublands, savannas, shore areas, and deserts.

Diet:

- Omnivorous: Eats plant matter such as fruit and flowers, insects, spiders, and the occasional small lizard or mammal.
 - About 20% of the animal’s diet is plant matter.
 - Opportunistic feeder: Lives in areas where food may be hard to find so it will eat whenever it gets a chance.

Adaptations:

- Defensive behavior: When threatened, they will open their mouth and inflate their beard, making their mouths appear much larger. Simultaneously, they will flatten their body on the ground, which makes it appear much larger as well.
- Spikes: This animal’s spikes may appear threatening, but for the most part are too flexible to cause any damage. The spines cause this lizard to be unappealing to potential predators.
- Camouflage: The yellow, brown, and red colors found on this animal’s body blend in well with its sandy habitat. This animal can make its skin darker or lighter, though it is unable to completely change the hue.
- Desert survival:
 - Have large stomachs to accommodate large meals, an important adaptation since their next meal is not always a guarantee in arid habitats.

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- Are able to survive on nutrients and fat reserves stored in their large abdomens.
- Are able to dig into the ground and remain dormant for long periods of time.
- Heat control: They may open their mouths to varying degrees to cool off. Strong legs to lift their body completely off the ground while they move. This reduces the heat taken in from the ground and increases the air flow over the belly to cool off.

Lifespan:

- Typically around 5-10 years (Median Life Expectancy data unavailable)

Ecosystem relationships:

- Predators: Large goannas (lizards), dingoes, black-headed pythons, gull-billed terns, birds of prey, and introduced carnivores such as cats and foxes.
- Role/niche: Acts as a mid-level link in the food web, both controlling the prey species below it and acting as a food source for large predators such as dingoes, goannas, and birds of prey.

Reproduction:

- Breeding season: Typically occurs between September and March
- Behavior: Males will display for females during courtship by darkening and inflating their beards. They will also use their head-bob to display willingness to mate.
- Clutch size: Typically ranges from 15-25 eggs.
- Maturation: Typically reach full size and sexual maturity between 1 and 2 years of age.

Activity:

- Crepuscular: Spend the morning and early evening sunning themselves on exposed branches or rocks, and retreat to shady areas or underground burrows during the hottest parts of the day.
- Are not social but will sometimes gather in groups, especially in popular feeding or basking areas.

Other “fun facts”:

- Diversity: There are seven different species of bearded dragon: inland or central (*Pogona vitticeps*), common (*Pogona barbata*), (*Pogona microlepidota*), western (*Pogona minima*), dwarf (*Pogona minor*), northwest (*Pogona mitchelli*), and Nullarbor (*Pogona nullarbor*).
- This animal’s common name comes from the “beard” of spikes located on its chin and throat.

Conservation Status and Threats:

- Not listed on the IUCN Red List
 - The closely related common bearded dragon is listed as “Least Concern”
- CITES—not listed

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- Threats:
 - Collection for the pet trade: The lizard's small size and relatively docile temperament make it a desirable pet species.
 - Habitat loss may be of minor concern. However, this animal is tolerant to slight habitat disturbance, and much of its native range is not desirable for human settlement.
- Conservation efforts:
 - Since the 1960's, Australia has strictly prohibited exports of any native wildlife – most inland bearded dragons in captivity are descended from lizards illegally exported from Australia and smuggled into the United States or Europe during the 1980s.
- Unlike most reptile species, the majority of inland bearded dragons owned as pets were captive-bred – many species of snakes, lizards, crocodiles and turtles are endangered because many individuals are removed from the wild for the pet trade or are killed to make products for sale.

At the Zoo

Sydney hatched at the Omaha Zoo in 2013 and came to the Maryland Zoo the same year.

What We Can Do

- Support the conservation efforts of local organizations like The Maryland Zoo as well as organizations working in the field to protect wildlife and conserve habitat.
- Make environmentally responsible lifestyle decisions to help conserve habitat – conserve energy, reduce litter and pollution.
- Do your research before buying a pet.
 - Make sure you are not purchasing a wild-caught individual – captive-bred species are often easy to find.
 - Make sure you know how to properly care for any animal before you decide to buy it as a pet.
 - Some things to consider include adequate housing, diet, temperature requirements, and lifespan.
 - Some pets also require a lot of time and money to be properly cared for.

Additional Resources and References:

- [Animal diversity web:](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Pogona_vitticeps/)
- [National Zoo:](http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/ReptilesAmphibians/Facts/FactSheets/Inlandbearded)
- <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/ReptilesAmphibians/Facts/FactSheets/Inlandbearded>

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[dragon.cfm](#)

- [Woodland Park Zoo: http://www.zoo.org/page.aspx?pid=1930#UiOX1NKORc0](http://www.zoo.org/page.aspx?pid=1930#UiOX1NKORc0)
- [Australian Museum: http://australianmuseum.net.au/Central-Bearded-Dragon](http://australianmuseum.net.au/Central-Bearded-Dragon)