

SUDAN PLATED LIZARD

Common Names: Great plated lizard, Rough-scaled plated lizard, African plated lizard, Tawny plated lizard

Order: Squamata

Family: Gerrhosauridae

Latin Name: *Gerrhosaurus major*

Habitat and Range: Found south of the Sahara, in Eastern and Southeastern Africa. They inhabit semi-arid steppes and/or savannas. They occupy burrows and termite mounds or rocky outcroppings.

Description: A grayish-brown lizard with transverse bands of squarish, plate-like, keeled scales, that have yellow spots on them. The belly is dark brown.. They have large eyes. The tail is often twice the length of the body. They resemble skinks. Head shields are fused into the skull. Males are larger than females with bright-colored throats.

Adult Size: 30-70 cm.—almost 1 foot – 2.2 feet.

Diet in the Wild: Omnivorous, eating a wide variety of plants and plant parts, insects, and small vertebrates (including other lizards and snakes)

Reproduction: Female usually lays 2 large eggs in moist soil, but have been known to lay up to 4. The eggs hatch after 3-4 months. The young are 10-15 cm. (3.9-5.5 inches) at hatching.

Life Span: According to one source, the average life expectancy of most species of wild lizards is five to ten years, if they survive to adulthood.

Perils: Large snakes, monitor lizards, and desert birds of prey. Young are especially vulnerable to predation, are inexperienced at finding and capturing food items, and are not yet able to build up food reserves inside their bodies to tide them over during times of scarcity or periods of aestivation. Of course, human interventions create problems for all life forms.

Protection: The coloring on plated lizards helps to camouflage in the desert climate, with their light brown scales helping them blend into the sand and rock formations. They use their thick, strong tail as a whip to fend off predators and strike them. The sharp plates on the tail can cause pain to any intruder to their burrow or personal space. They will often run and stop suddenly to raise the tail in a threatening manner. They hide in crevices, wedging themselves into small openings where the predator cannot reach them. Their plated, hard scales act as a type of armor to protect them from the dry desert climate and the bright sun.

Interesting Facts: They are diurnal. They often share their burrow or termite mound with other animals including some snakes. They have hollowed out ear holes on each side of their head that help protect the ears from sand.

Ecology: Plated lizards are an important link in the food chain. They are predators but in turn are preyed upon by many larger reptiles, carnivorous mammals and birds. Humans exploit these animals, hunting them for the pet trade, as they are difficult to breed in captivity and are often wild-caught. Plated lizards have become a very popular pet. They are not considered to be endangered at this time.

Diet at the Zoo: A platter with a variety of vegetables, crickets, mealworms.