**Chinese Water Dragon**

*Other names:* Asian Water Dragon, Thai Water Dragon, and Green Water Dragon

**Physical Description:** Water dragons are variable in color from dark to light green. The coloration is partly temperature dependent; when the lizard is cooler, the markings will be darker, but when the lizard is warmer, the markings will be lighter. There may be pink tones under the throat in male water dragons. Down the ridge of the back is a line of soft spikes that spans from the base of the neck to the end of the tail. The tail on water dragons has alternating green and brown stripes, and is long and thin but very strong and used for balance and defense. The lizard’s tail takes up over half of the body length and is long and thin. The underside of the water dragon is lighter than the top, and often is a light green, cream, or whitish color. The skin is dry and loose to the touch, with sandpaper-like bumps on the dorsal side of the body. The front legs of the lizard are less developed and less strong than the powerful back legs. Water dragons have a photosensitive “eye spot” on the top of their heads in the center, called a *pineal gland*.

**Diet in the Wild:** Primarily predatory, the water dragon is able to eat from a variety of food sources in the forest. Water dragons eat small fish or other aquatic animals, small mammals, or another small reptile. They can also eat the vegetation surrounding them in the forest, but mostly will eat insects from the trees, rocks, or flying through the air.

**Diet at the Zoo:** Earthworms, insectivore diet, green beans, papaya, frozen mixed veggies, wax worms, meal worms, crickets.

**Habitat & Range:** As the name suggests, the Chinese water dragon’s habitat spans throughout parts of Asia, including Thailand, China, Vietnam and India. They favor habitat nearby to freshwater streams, lakes, and rivers. They live in habitats that are heavily forested around these water areas, such as rainforests and swamps, and spend most of their time in the trees along the bodies of water. Water dragons live in areas of high humidity, and temperatures of 80-100°F.

**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 in the Wild:** Larger forest snakes and birds of prey in forested Asian habitats. Humans often capture water dragons for the pet trade, but are not often sold in local food markets. Habitat destruction of the rainforests and vegetated areas in Asia are a main threat to water dragons.

**Physical Adaptations:**
- The green markings on the lizard help it to camouflage in the green, forested habitat it lives in. Water dragons use their long tail, which is strong and whip-like, to fend off any predators.
- The water dragon uses its strong front claws to scale trees and branches in the forest. Water dragons can run bipedal, on its rear two legs, but do not use this method of moving often.
- The tongue is long and sticky, which lets them capture and hold their main prey.
Behavioral Adaptations:
- Water dragons are active during the day, described as **diurnal**.
- While water dragons live in loose groups of a male and several females, the males and females may show aggression to each other in the form of arm waving, puffing of the throat, head bobbing and chasing.
- When nervous or frightened water dragons take refuge in the water. They are strong swimmers and if necessary, can remain submerged for long periods of time, up to 25 minutes. If detected, they also may resort to flight, taking refuge inside one of its retreats, which typically are nearby.
- Like most animals, the lizard’s main line of defense is to avoid detection, either by hiding or through camouflage.

Reproduction and Development:
- Water dragons are **oviparous**, in which the eggs are released by the female and development of the offspring occurs outside the maternal body.
- A female water dragon will lay eggs that hatch after about 60 days of incubation, and will lay anywhere from 5-20 eggs. The hatchlings are about five to six inches in total length and have the same coloration as the adults, with prominent green and brown banding on the tail.
- While mating, the male bites the female's crest at the back of her neck to hold her in place. The female lays 6 to 15 eggs in a clutch which hatch after 60 to 75 days. Young ones are almost 6 inches in length at birth and have to fend for themselves.

Additional Information:
- The water dragon uses its **pineal gland**, or the “third eye” to help it regulate temperature. It is a photosensitive area and helps prevent the lizard from overheating or being too cool. It can also sense if a bird is flying overhead, so the lizard can flee from predators.

Conservation Connection: Lizards
Reptiles are important components of the food webs in most ecosystems. They fill a critical role both as predator and prey species. Herbivorous species can also be important seed dispersers, particularly on island habitats. Reptile species can also be useful to people, in some areas, they help control the numbers of serious agricultural pests by consuming rodent and insect pests.

Don’t buy products, particularly when you’re abroad, made from reptile skins such as handbags, boots made from snake or crocodile skin or jewelry made from tortoiseshell.

Conservation Status: (IUCN Status)
Not assessed

Conservation Efforts: N/A

Glossary: List of definitions of the most important recurrent technical terms used in the text.

**diurnal** – animals that are active during the day.

**pineal gland** - a photosensitive “eye spot” in the center of the top of their head.

05/2013
oviparity - Reproduction in which the eggs are released by the female; development of the offspring occurs outside the maternal body. Adj., oviparous

Sources:
- Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Gardens
- http://www.rightpet.com/ReptileDetail/chinese-water-dragon
- http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/ReptilesAmphibians/Facts/FactSheets/Asianwaterdragon.cfm