Dabb-*Uromastyx acanthinura,* Sahara-*Uromastyx geyri*

# Spiny Tailed Lizard (Uromastyx)

***Class:*** Reptilia***. Order:*** Squamata***. Family:*** Agamidae.
**Other names:**

**Physical Description:** The females of this species are smaller and with less outstanding markings and color than the males, as in other lizard species. The Uromastyx is characterized by spines that stretch from the base of the tail to the end of the tail in horizontal rows. The females are typically a light beige color with black spots on their back, while males are a brighter yellow coloring with black markings on the back.

**Diet in the Wild:** Primarily herbivores but the occasional insectivore.

**Diet at the Zoo:** Mustard greens, finch seed, tortoise biscuits, endive, millet seed, bean mix, romaine

**Habitat & Range:** Found in the habitat spanning throughout parts of North Africa and the Middle East and in parts of southern Asia. This range is primarily dry, and the Uromastyx stays at elevations above 2000 feet. Their habitat is desert regions or climates that mimic a desert. They often create burrows in the sand around places of rock clusters and formations.

**Life Span:** Around 7-9 years of age, an Uromastyx will meet the full length of 10-16 inches, females growing to be a bit larger than males.

**Perils in the wild:** Pythons, monitor lizards, 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, and Uromastyx are often captured and sold in the human food trade in areas where they are native

**Physical Adaptations:**

- Like most animals, the lizard's main line of defense is to avoid detection, either by hiding or through camouflage. If detected, the lizard will resort to flight, taking refuge inside one of its retreats, which typically are nearby. The beige and black spots on the lizards help it to blend in to the surrounding rock formations. Uromastyx use their spiny tail, which is strong and muscular, to swing at their opponent, both to intimidate as well as strike and harm.

**Behavioral Adaptations:**

- Spiny tail lizards are ***diurnal*** or day active.
- They are solitary animals and come together for mating purposes.
- Lizards regulate their body temperature by basking in the sun's warm rays and during mid-day heat seek refuge in the cool shade. This type of ***behavioral thermoregulation*** helps to maintain a steady body temperature of 97-102 degrees. The term "cold-blooded" clearly does not apply here!

09/04/2012

**Reproduction and Development:**

- A female Uromastyx will lay anywhere from 5 eggs to 50 eggs, depending on various environmental conditions as well as the fertility and location of the male and female. The eggs are in an incubation period for 70 to 80 days, and are about 2 inches long when hatched. Eggs are laid about a month after copulation in dens the lizards dig.

**Additional Information:**

- The name "Uromastyx" is derived from the Ancient Greek word meaning "tail." When basking, the lizards color changes from darker in cool weather to lighter in warm weather. Uromastyx sleep in their dens with the tails pointing to or leaning against the opening as way of defending from unwanted intruders to the nest or dwelling. Uromastyx are territorial, often living in groups of a few females and one male, or alone. The Uromastyx are very active lizards and should not be kept as pets.
- Uromastyx 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. So far as humans are concerned, Uromastyx are benign, causing no problems. Humans often exploit these animals, hunting them for the pet trade and for the food trade. Reportedly, these reptiles are difficult to breed in captivity, so oftentimes they are introduced to the pet trade by wild capture.

**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.

So far as humans are concerned, lizards are benign, causing no problems. However, humans are rapidly destroying and altering the habitats which plants and animals need for survival. Humans exploit these animals, hunting them for the pet trade.

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

**behavioral thermoregulation-** How a reptile may regulate its body temperature by its behavior. By basking in the sun to warm and moving to the shade to escape the heat of the day allows there animals to maintain a relatively stable temperature of 97-102 degrees.

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

**Sources:**


- Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Gardens
- http://www.backwaterreptiles.com/uromastyx-for-sale.html


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- Hickman, C.P. Roberts, L.S. 1994. Biology of Animals
- Halliday, T. Adler, K. 1986. The Encyclopedia of Reptiles and Amphibians.