

REAL-LIFE  
DRAGONS



# BEARDED DRAGONS

by Wil Mara

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**BEARDED  
DRAGONS**

by **Wil Mara**

**Consultant:**

**Colin Donihue, PhD**

**Postdoctoral Researcher**

**Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology**

**Harvard University**

**Cambridge, Massachusetts**

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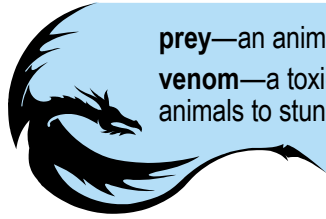


## A CREEPING DRAGON

It's sunset in the desert. A creature scurries across the sand. Then it hears something. The creature slows down and turns. Without a sound, it creeps onto a rock. A bug scuttles along below. The creature does not care what kind of bug this is. Food isn't easy to find in the desert. The creature moves down the other side of the rock, slowly. It gets within inches of the bug. It lunges forward with its mouth open. Bam! It snatches the meal off the ground.



The **prey** struggles to free itself. But the creature's grip is too tight. Its **venom** is too strong. Soon the bug stops wiggling. The creature swallows it in a few mighty gulps. Then it licks the last lingering flavors from around its mouth and moves on. This creature is a bearded dragon lizard. It is still hungry. There is more hunting to do.



**prey**—an animal hunted by another animal for food  
**venom**—a toxic substance produced by some animals to stun or kill prey

## The Dragons of Mythology

Lizards that are called “dragons” get their name from the dragons of myth. The word “dragon” comes from Latin and Greek words that mean “huge serpent.” Dragons of stories are giant, fire-breathing beasts. They often have spiked tails and scaly skin. Bearded dragons have some things in common with the dragons of lore. Their skin is scaly. They have long tails. Fortunately, bearded dragons don't breathe fire!



## A SPIKY DRAGON

The bearded dragon is an interesting lizard. Its body is wide and flat. Little spikes run around its triangular head. It has a flap of skin on its throat. The flap extends when the animal is angry or alarmed. A male also pushes out the flap when trying to attract females. When the flap extends, it turns a dark color. It looks like a beard. This is how the lizard gets the “bearded” part of its name.

A bearded dragon’s mouth is wide and thin. A narrow, pink tongue helps it grab food. More rows of spikes run along its sides between the front and hind legs. It has five long claws on each foot. Its long tail sweeps back and forth in the sand.

A bearded dragon’s pebbly skin is brown, gray, or tan. Darker spots may run along the back and down the tail. Its belly is lighter, usually yellow, cream, or white. Males are able to change color. They can become darker during fights with other males.





Male bearded dragons are slightly larger than females. They average about 22 to 24 inches (56 to 61 centimeters) long. Females grow to about 18 to 20 inches (46 to 51 cm) long.



*The “beard” on this dragon became darker as it extended out from its neck.*



## IDENTIFYING DRAGONS

The bearded dragon is a reptile. Scales cover a reptile's body. The scales are tough and dry. The bearded dragon is a type of reptile called a lizard. The bearded dragon is part of a group of lizards known as agamids. Agamid lizards have strong legs. They are excellent climbers. They also have triangular-shaped heads. Many agamid lizards can also change color.

*The Sinai agama is an agamid lizard related to the bearded dragon.*



Within the agamids, the bearded dragon is in a group called *Pogona*. *Pogona* includes all the known **species** of bearded dragons. There are eight *Pogona* species. Each species looks slightly different from the others.



**species**—a group of creatures that are capable of reproducing with one another



*Rankin's dragon is a rare species found only in northeastern Australia.*

## DRAGON FACT

Of the eight species of *Pogona*, the eastern bearded dragon was discovered first, in 1829. The most recent, Rankin's dragon, was first identified in 1985.