

## Gila Monsters

Gila monsters are lizards that are found in the desert areas of the American southwest and Mexico. They are the largest lizards in the United States and will reach lengths of up to two feet. They are also the only poisonous lizards. They release venom (poison) from their lower jaws when they bite their prey. In order to get this poison into their victims, they must chew the animal with their grooved teeth. The venom will completely overpower the Gila monster's prey, but it is usually not fatal to humans. In fact, Gila monsters do not bite people at all unless they are disturbed. Before they do that, they open their mouths wide and hiss to warn predators and attackers to stay away. Still, people fear Gila monsters and because of this, there are many myths about them. For instance, some people think that Gila monsters spit poison. There is also a myth that they leap into the air and sting people with their poisonous tongues. Neither of these myths is true.

Gila monsters live under rocks or in burrows that they either dig themselves or take over from other animals. They prefer places with sandy or gravelly soil and shrubs. Gila monsters eat birds' eggs and small mammals, which they hunt during warm weather. When they find eggs and prey, they eat as much as possible at one time. In cold weather, they do not go out looking for food. Instead, they rely on fat stored in their tails and abdomens. Gila monsters are most active in the spring when it is easy for them to find their favorite food – eggs. They do not have very good eyesight, so they use their senses of smell and taste to find food. They do this by flicking out their forked tongues, which they use to pick up scent particles in the air. For the most part, Gila monsters move around *very* slowly and do not roam much, so it is difficult to spot a Gila monster in the wild.

Gila monsters have striking patterns of color on their skin. They have black, orange, pink or yellow blotches and black faces. They are known as beaded lizards because they have small scales across their backs that look like tiny beads. Gila monsters get their name from the Gila River Basin where many of these lizards are found. This area extends from most of Arizona into parts of New Mexico and Mexico.

In the summer, female Gila monsters dig holes in the ground to lay their eggs. After about four months, baby Gila monsters hatch from their shells. They are born already knowing how to live life as a Gila monster. They do not need any special care or training from their parents!

## Gila Monsters Questions

1. Gila monsters are
  - a. lizards.
  - b. poisonous snakes.
  - c. mythical creatures that do not really exist.
  - d. sea mammals.
  
2. Gila monsters are found in
  - a. Mexico
  - b. Arizona
  - c. New Mexico
  - d. All of the above
  
3. Gila monsters are
  - a. the largest lizards in the world.
  - b. the largest lizards in the United States.
  - c. the most dangerous reptiles in the United States.
  - d. easy to spot in the wild because of their bright colors.
  
4. Gila monsters
  - a. open their mouths wide and hiss to warn attackers to stay away.
  - b. attack even if they are not provoked.
  - c. are not dangerous at all.
  - d. spit poison at predators.
  
5. A Gila monster eats mostly
  - a. other lizards.
  - b. shrubs and roots.
  - c. birds.
  - d. eggs.
  
6. Gila monsters hunt for food
  - a. in warm weather.
  - b. in cool weather.
  - c. all the time.
  - d. only in humid weather.

**Gila Monsters Questions (Cont'd)**

7. To find food, Gila monsters rely mostly on
  - a. their excellent eyesight.
  - b. their senses of smell and taste.
  - c. scent glands in their abdomen and tail.
  - d. fat glands in their abdomen and tail.
  
8. Gila monsters are known as beaded lizards because
  - a. people make beads out of their skins.
  - b. they have scales that look like beads.
  - c. they eat tiny eggs that look like beads.
  - d. they have colorful patterns that look like they are wearing beads.
  
9. Gila monsters get their name from the \_\_\_\_\_,  
an area where many of these lizards are found.
  
10. Baby Gila monsters
  - a. are cared for by their mothers.
  - b. are cared for by their fathers.
  - c. are cared for by both parents.
  - d. are born without needing any special care.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Gila Monsters Answers

1. a
2. d
3. b
4. a
5. d
6. a
7. b
8. b
9. Gila River Basin
10. d