



**CAIMAN  
LIZARD**  
**SQUAMATA**  
**Family: Teiidae**  
**Genus: *Dracaena***  
**Species: *guianensis***



**Range:** Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and the Guianas

**Habitat:** swampy habitats and other wooded areas, which are flooded

**Niche:** mostly aquatic, carnivorous

**Wild diet:** snails, fish, crawfish, clams, invertebrates

**Zoo diet:**

**Life Span:** captivity 8 – 12 years

**Sexual dimorphism:**

**Location in SF Zoo:** South American Tropical Rainforest and Aviary

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### **APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:**

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The Caiman Lizard has a large heavy-set body and short but powerful limbs. Its head is bulky and often a red or orange color. The body is typically a bright green with slight dark green banding. There are horned raised scales along the dorsal of the back, resembling crocodiles and alligators. This help to provide some protection against predators. Males develop an orange and black throat.

**Weight:** 10 lbs

**Length:** 4 feet

These lizards are adapted to an aquatic lifestyle. Their jaws are heavily muscular to help aid in eating its normal prey of snails, crawfish and fresh water clams. It has a long and flattened tail, which aids the Caiman Lizard to successfully swim and dive and can be used for defense. It has a nictitating membrane to protect its eye while underwater.

They have a forked tongue used for locating and smelling prey.

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### **STATUS & CONSERVATION**

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Least concern. Today, although the caiman lizard is not considered to be a species that is under immediate threat from extinction. Populations have been declining in specific areas, mainly due to habitat loss often caused by high levels of pollution and deforestation. They are hunted for the reptile leather trade and their skin.

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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However they do specialize in snails. It takes the snail in the jaws, raises its head up so that the prey will slide into the back of the mouth then crushes it with its back teeth. It then spits out the pieces of shell. The lizard has been known to even kill and eat Amazon river turtles. By crushing shell by the edges and eating its softer parts chunk after chunk.

They are solitary in lifestyle. These lizards spend a lot of time in the water and they inhabit marshes, streams and flooded forests. Caiman lizards often bask on branches overhanging the water. If disturbed or threatened, the lizard will drop into the water and quickly swim away.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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Little is known about this lizard's reproduction, but they are thought to behave in a similar way to other large lizard species. After mating, females will lay their eggs into a hole in the riverbank, which they protect by covering it up. When the young hatch, they are completely independent and need no prenatal care.

Incubation: 179 days # of young: 5 – 7	Sexual Maturity: Weight at birth: Length at birth:
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## MISCELLANEOUS

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The name "caiman" comes from their appearance, which resembles the caiman crocodile of South America.

### **Sources:**

Lizards of the World, © 1998, Chris Mattison, Facts on File, Inc.  
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