



PLUMED BASILISK

SQUAMATA

Family: *Corytophanidae*
Genus: *Basiliscus*
Species: *plumifrons*



Range: Eastern Honduras, through Nicaragua and Costa Rica, to western Panama.

Habitat: tropical, dense and shady rainforests near rivers and streams mainly on trees, lianas, bromeliads, orchids and ferns.

Niche: Primarily carnivorous, semiaquatic/arboreal, diurnal

Wild diet: insects, small vertebrates, and some fruits and flowers

Zoo diet:

Life Span: wild up to 10 years, captivity 8 – 12 years

Sexual dimorphism: see photos: (top right) males have three crests & (bottom) females one

Location in SF Zoo: South American Tropical Rainforest and Aviary

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

The plumed basilisk, also called a green basilisk, double crested basilisk, or Jesus Christ lizard, is a part of the Iguana family. They are bright green, but also dark-green and blue-green and a yellow belly with a row of bluish spots along the dorsal ridge and a second row along their sides. The female has one crest on her head. The male has three crests: one distinctive high crest on their head and toothed crests on the back and tail. The crests are used as a sexual display. Their whip-like tail can be 2 ½ to 3 times as long as the body.

Green basilisk lizards can avoid danger by darting across water. When threatened, they can drop from a tree into the water and sprint, upright, about 5 feet per second across the surface. They have long hind legs with long, wide toes on their rear feet with fringes of skin that unfurl in the water, increasing surface area. As they rapidly churn their legs, they slap their splayed feet hard against the water, creating a tiny air pocket that keeps them from sinking, provided they maintain their speed. They can run as far as 100 feet on the water, while using their tail for support. When the speed decreases, it sinks into the water and resorts to its excellent swimming skills or it can also stay submerged for up to 30 minutes.

Weight:

Length: 2 ft (inc. tail)

STATUS & CONSERVATION

This species is relatively common in the wild and listed as Least Concern on IUCN Red List. There is a need to monitor the harvesting of this species for the pet trade, although at present this does not appear to be a major threat (many in the trade are captive bred).

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Males are very territorial; a single male may keep land containing a large group of females with whom he mates. They spend much of their time in the trees and are never far from a body of water.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Females prepare a shallow trench in warm, damp sand or soil, where she lays her eggs and covers them. The eggs are left to hatch on their own. Hatchlings emerge as fully independent lizards with the ability to run, climb, and swim. Females may lay several clutches per year.

Incubation: 8 – 10 mos	Sexual Maturity: F 15 – 18 mos
# of young: 5 – 15	Weight at birth: 0.11 oz
	Length at birth: 1

MISCELLANEOUS

The plumed basilisk's genus name *Basiliscus* is taken from the legendary reptilian creature of European mythology, which could turn a man to stone by its gaze: the Basilisk. This name derives from the Greek *basiliskos* meaning "little king".

Sources:

Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia, 2nd Edition, Vol 17, © 2003 Michael Hutchins, editor, Gale Group, p 245

<http://www.waza.org/en/zoo/choose-a-species/reptiles/lizards-and-tuatara/basiliscus-plumifrons>

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<http://naturescrusaders.wordpress.com/2009/02/16/green-basilisk-lizards-eat-insects-rodents-and-runs-on-water/>

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