

Reptiles



Iguana



Python hatching from egg



Tortoises mating

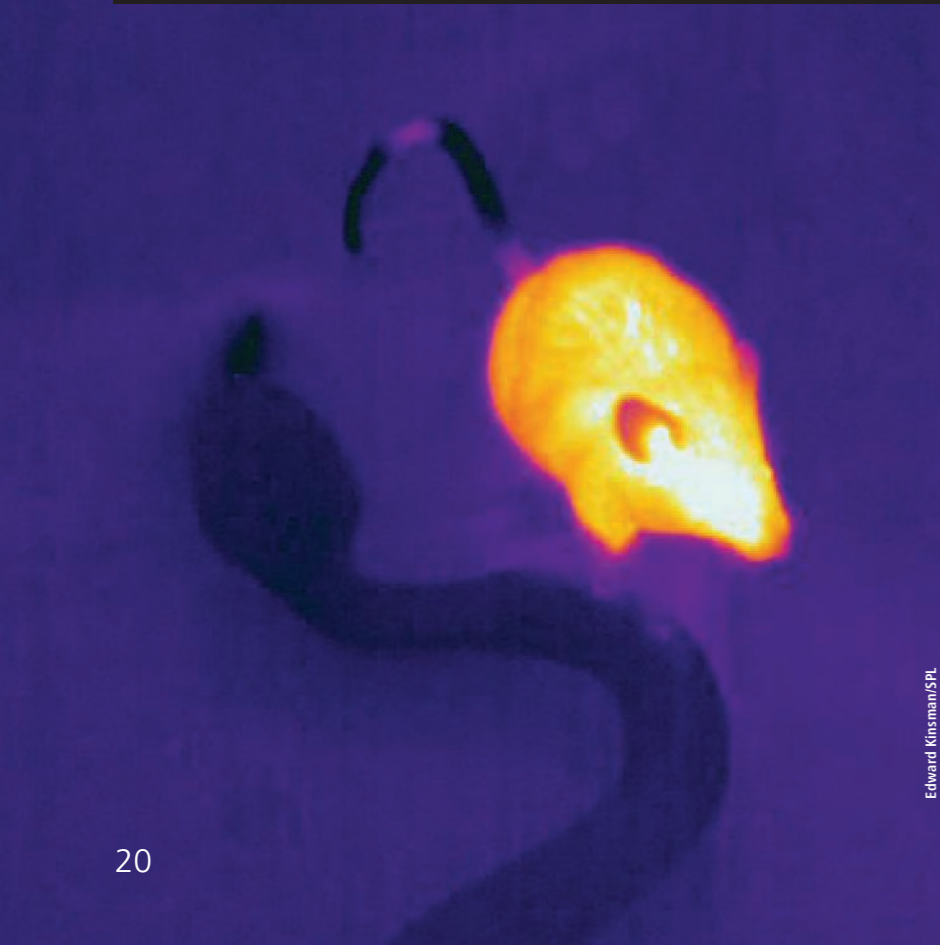


Green turtle laying eggs on the beach



Newly hatched baby green turtles

Thermogram of a snake and a mouse. Thermographic cameras detect radiation in the infrared range of the electromagnetic spectrum. The amount of infrared radiation emitted by an object increases as its temperature increases



Edward Krasman/SPL

What are reptiles (taxonomic class Reptilia), and how do they control their body temperature?

These images show some of the features that characterise reptiles. The thermogram of a snake and a mouse is a striking illustration of the vastly lower body temperature of the ectothermic ('cold-blooded') reptile versus the endothermic ('warm-blooded') mammal. Many reptiles spend the first daylight hours basking in the sun (see the iguana) to raise their bodies to the temperature required for activity.

Reptile skin is covered with a horny epidermis, making it watertight and enabling reptiles to live on dry land (in contrast to amphibians). Many reptiles are also protected by scales (as in the mangrove snake) or scutes — horny plates fused into protective shells in tortoises and turtles.

Reproduction in reptiles involves internal fertilisation (see tortoise image), in contrast to most amphibians. While some reptiles give birth to live young, most lay eggs (e.g. the green turtle), which are leathery rather than stiff shelled (e.g. in pythons). The young are miniature versions of the adults (e.g. green turtles), again, in stark contrast to most amphibians.

Mangrove snake



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