

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# A Lizard with a Blue Tongue

By Guy Belleranti

Australia is home to some of the world's most interesting animals. One group of lizards living on the Australian continent stands out in a colorful way—they all have blue tongues! These lizards are called blue-tongued skinks.



Blue-tongued skinks are smooth-scaled reptiles with large heads, long bodies, and very short legs. They can grow up to two feet long.

These peculiar animals are active during the daytime, and just like other reptiles, they regulate their body temperature by warming up in the sun and cooling down in the shade. At night, they find shelter in logs, under leaf litter, and in burrows.

Female blue-tongued skinks don't lay eggs. Instead, the soft egg sacs hatch inside their bodies and the young are born live. The babies are miniature versions of the adults. Within a few days, they're off to fend for themselves.

One of the most important daytime jobs for every blue-tongued skink is searching for food. Using its blue tongue to "smell," it finds scrumptious foods like fruit, flowers, snails, insects, slugs, and worms. At the same time, it must watch out for predators such as large raptors, large snakes, kookaburras, and feral dogs and cats.

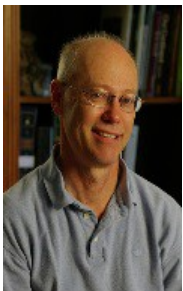
Unlike most other lizards, this short-legged, low-to-the-ground reptile moves too slowly to outrun most predators. Still, if a blue-tongued skink is grabbed by a predator from behind, it can make an escape by allowing its own tail to fall off. Later, a new tail will regenerate, or grow back.

When a blue-tongued skink is faced by a predator head-on, it has to use a different defense mechanism than losing its tail. This is because the gentle blue-tongued skink has peg-like teeth that aren't sharp enough to deliver dangerous bites. Instead the skink's best



chance of survival is to puff up its body, making itself look larger. Then, it opens its jaws, startling the predator with its bright pink mouth and long blue tongue, while hissing loudly. The bright colors it displays are a warning sign in the animal kingdom: "Keep away! I'm poisonous!" Although blue-tongued skinks really aren't poisonous, the predator doesn't know this.

Did you know that blue-tongued skinks are becoming popular pets in Australia? These unique, mild-mannered reptiles sure look a lot different than the average lizard! As the largest of all types of skinks, and one of the gentlest, it's not surprising to see why these reptiles have made their way into peoples homes—and hearts!



## About the Author

Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.

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1. According to the article, what is a disadvantage of a blue-tongued skink's body being close to the ground?
  - a. It's body absorbs too much heat from the ground.
  - b. It cannot quickly run away from predators.
  - c. It has a difficult time finding food.
  - d. It cannot fit into spaces like logs, under leaf litter, or in burrows.

2. Compared with other reptiles, the blue-tongued skink is generally more...
  - a. gentle
  - b. aggressive
  - c. poisonous
  - d. fearful

3. Describe some unique physical features of the blue-tongued skink.

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4. According to the information in the article, how are blue-tongued skinks similar to mammals?

- a. They are warm-blooded
- b. They have hairs on their body
- c. The females give birth to live young
- d. They feed their young milk

5. Describe two ways the blue-tongued skink can defend itself from predators.

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Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.



- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| _____ 1. peculiar    | a. birds of prey                               |
| _____ 2. startling   | b. an animal that hunts and eats other animals |
| _____ 3. scrumptious | c. to keep under control                       |
| _____ 4. predator    | d. strange; unusual                            |
| _____ 5. regulate    | e. to regrow a part of the body                |
| _____ 6. burrows     | f. frightening; catching off guard             |
| _____ 7. raptors     | g. extremely tiny                              |
| _____ 8. miniature   | h. delicious; tasty                            |
| _____ 9. regenerate  | i. untamed; wild                               |
| _____ 10. feral      | j. tunnels or holes dug by small animals       |

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In the article, “A Lizard with a Blue Tongue,” you learned that blue-tongued skinks will fool their predators into thinking they're poisonous to eat when they aren't. The brightly-colored tongues and mouths of the skinks help them to trick their predators into thinking this.



Choose another species that uses a disguise, trick, or physical feature to fool its predators into staying away. Describe the species, identify a predator it might have, and explain the disguise, trick, or feature it uses to scare away the predator.

[illegible]

# ANSWER KEY

## A Lizard with a Blue Tongue

By Guy Belleranti



1. According to the article, what is a disadvantage of a blue-tongued skink's body being close to the ground? b.

a. It's body absorbs too much heat from the ground.  
b. It cannot quickly run away from predators.  
c. It has a difficult time finding food.  
d. It cannot fit into spaces like logs, under leaf litter, or in burrows.

2. Compared with other reptiles, the blue-tongued skink is generally more... a.

a. gentle                      b. aggressive  
c. poisonous                d. fearful

3. Describe some unique physical features of the blue-tongued skink.

Smooth-scaled, large heads, long bodies, short legs, low to the ground, blue tongues, up to two feet long, peg-like teeth, bright pink mouth, regenerating tail

4. According to the information in the article, how are blue-tongued skinks similar to mammals? c.

a. They are warm-blooded                      b. They have hairs on their body  
c. The females give birth to live young      d. They feed their young milk

5. Describe two ways the blue-tongued skink can defend itself from predators.

The blue-tongued skink can allow its own tail to fall off and grow a new one in its place. The blue-tongued skink can also puff itself up to appear larger, scaring off predators by hissing and displaying its blue tongue and pink mouth.

## ANSWER KEY

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Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.



- |           |                |           |   |
|-----------|----------------|-----------|---|
| <b>d.</b> | 1. peculiar    | <b>a.</b> | birds of prey                               |
| <b>f.</b> | 2. startling   | <b>b.</b> | an animal that hunts and eats other animals |
| <b>h.</b> | 3. scrumptious | <b>c.</b> | to keep under control                       |
| <b>b.</b> | 4. predator    | <b>d.</b> | strange; unusual                            |
| <b>c.</b> | 5. regulate    | <b>e.</b> | to regrow a part of the body                |
| <b>j.</b> | 6. burrows     | <b>f.</b> | frightening; catching off guard             |
| <b>a.</b> | 7. raptors     | <b>g.</b> | extremely tiny                              |
| <b>g.</b> | 8. miniature   | <b>h.</b> | delicious; tasty                            |
| <b>e.</b> | 9. regenerate  | <b>i.</b> | untamed; wild                               |
| <b>i.</b> | 10. feral      | <b>j.</b> | tunnels or holes dug by small animals       |