

# Junior Ranger Nature Notes

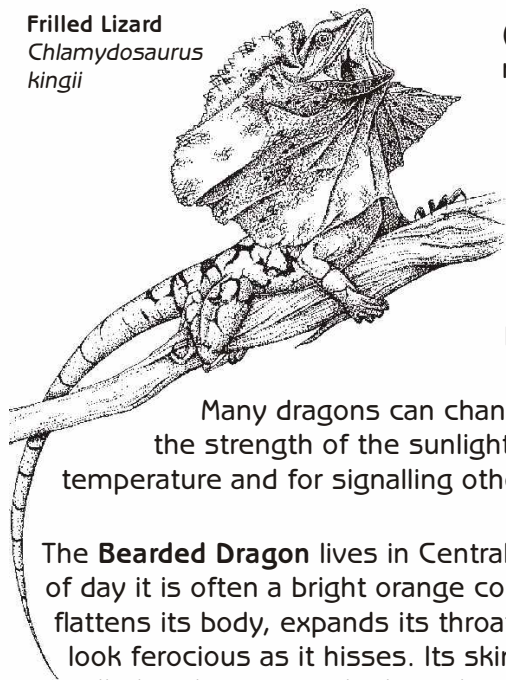


## DRAGONS (FAMILY AGAMIDAE)

The word dragon makes us think of fire-breathing monsters.  
But the Territory dragons are a fairly harmless bunch.

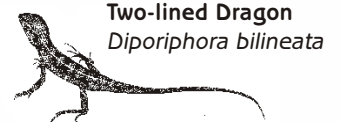
Dragons are rough skinned lizards which are active during the daytime (*diurnal*). Their skin scales may have ridges on them (*keels*) or have developed into large spines. Most spend their time on the ground (*terrestrial*) although some live in trees (*arboreal*). Ants, other insects and spiders are their main tucker, but some larger dragons may eat small reptiles and mammals, baby birds and even wildflowers and other parts of plants. All dragons lay soft-shelled eggs.

Frilled Lizard  
*Chlamydosaurus kingii*



The **Frilled Lizard** may be spotted in the Top End during the wet season (October to May). They are less active in the dry season and hide in rough-barked trees. They are the largest of Australia's 60 or so species of dragons. It is famous as it extends its frill when it wants to look ferocious. The frill contains a number of fine flexible rods like the spokes of an umbrella. If scared you may watch them as they quickly run away on their back legs and clamber up a tree.

Another very common Top End dragon is the **Two-lined Dragon**. It is very small and has two obvious lines running down its back.



Two-lined Dragon  
*Diporiphora bilineata*

Many dragons can change colour quite quickly, according to mood or activity or in response to the strength of the sunlight. These changes are useful for camouflage, maintaining body temperature and for signalling other lizards. Dragons regularly shed their old skins for new ones.

The **Bearded Dragon** lives in Central Australia. It warms its body by sun-baking in the mornings. At this time of day it is often a bright orange colour. But if you disturb it, it puffs up, flattens its body, expands its throat into a 'beard' and opens its mouth to look ferocious as it hisses. Its skin also goes darker. A dark pigment called melanin spreads through its skin and causes the colour change. This is the same pigment that makes suntanned people's skin dark.

Bearded Dragon  
*Pogona vitticeps*



Military Dragon  
*Ctenophorus isolepis*

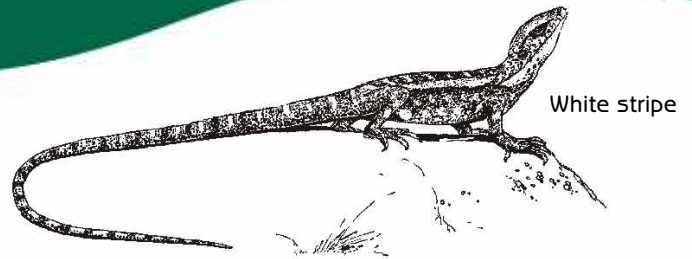
The **Military Dragon** is a speedy desert living lizard. It likes to hide in spiky Spinifex grass *Triodia spp.* if in danger and has camouflage colouration to help.

Want to know more dragons and reptiles?

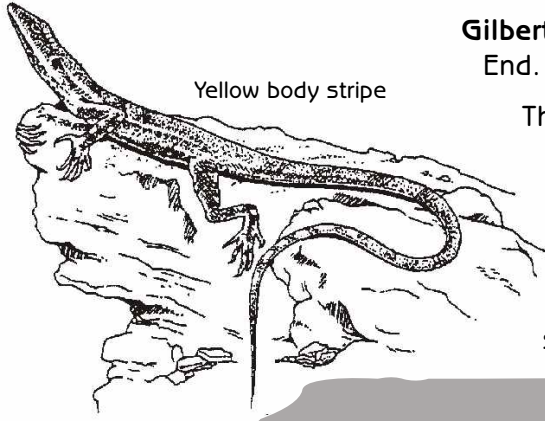
Check out the reference book *Reptiles & Amphibians* by Harold Cogger.

## WATER DRAGONS

Look for the following dragons near waterholes and rivers. They eat a variety of insects and spiders which they have no trouble catching because of their speed and climbing ability.



White stripe



Yellow body stripe

**Gilbert's Dragon** *Lophognathus gilberti* is common near water in the Top End. It has a distinctive white stripe on each side of its face.

The **Long-nosed Water Dragon** *Lophognathus longirostris* may be spotted near waterholes in the Centre. It has a yellow stripe along each side of its body.

Away from waterholes, desert dragons may drink rain water or collect dew which falls on their tails and bodies. The drops are channelled to the mouth along grooves between their skin scales.

These two animals are sometimes called "ta-ta lizards". You can find out why by decoding the following puzzle.

1 = A	5 = E	9 = I	13 = M	17 = Q	21 = U	25 = Y
2 = B	6 = F	10 = J	14 = N	18 = R	22 = V	26 = Z
3 = C	7 = G	11 = K	15 = O	19 = S	23 = W	
4 = D	8 = H	12 = L	16 = P	20 = T	24 = X	

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## AUSTRALIA'S UNIQUE DESERT DRAGON

The **Thorny Devil** or **Moloch** is an unmistakable and unique Australian dragon. It lives in the arid sand and Spinifex deserts of the Northern Territory. This slow-moving dragon feeds only on small black ants and like other dragons can slowly change colour to match its background.

As its scientific name suggests to some it may look a 'horrid' animal. However it is completely harmless despite appearances. It has sharp cone-shaped spines from head to tail along its fat flattened body. Above each eye there is a large curved spike that gives the appearance that this 'devil' has horns. There is a funny knob that sticks out behind the neck.

When threatened this harmless dragon bends its head down and the knobby neck looks like a head.

Thorny Devil  
*Moloch horridus*

