

Amphibian and Reptile Frequently Asked Questions

#6 - Lizards



Table of Contents:

6.1 Question 1: Are there lizards in Wisconsin?.....Page 1

6.2 Question 2: I see lizards near my home. Are they a danger to myself, my children or my pets?.Page 2

6.3 Question 3: What do lizards in Wisconsin eat?.....Page 2

6.4 Question 4: Should I keep a lizard that I caught while on vacation/hiking as a pet?.....Page 2

6.5 Question 5: I caught a lizard while on a hike/vacation and its tail fell off. Will it die?.....Page 2

6.6 Question 6: How is the slender glass lizard different from a snake?.....Page 2

6. Lizards

6.1 Question 1: Are there lizards in Wisconsin?

Yes, there are four lizard species native to Wisconsin. These are the six-lined racerunner, common five-lined skink, prairie skink, and slender glass lizard.

None of Wisconsin’s native lizards are particularly common or widespread, although only the slender glass lizard is listed as Endangered in Wisconsin. The other three species are listed as species of special concern. The six-lined racerunner, for example is only found in southwestern and western Wisconsin, on dry sand prairies, grasslands, or bluffsides. The prairie skink is found primarily in northwestern Wisconsin, associated with prairies and grasslands. The common five-lined skink is a hardwood forest species found in central Wisconsin and in a band up into northeastern Wisconsin. While the slender glass lizard is most often found in grassland/prairies with sandy soils located in west-central and central Wisconsin.



Slender Glass Lizard



Prairie Skink



Six-Lined Racerunner



Common Five-lined Skink

6.2 Question 2: I see lizards near my home. Are they a danger to myself, my children or my pets?

No. All of Wisconsin's native lizards are small and harmless. Chances are they will quickly flee as soon as you approach them and will only act aggressively if captured.

6.3 Question 3: What do lizards in Wisconsin eat?

Lizards in Wisconsin eat primarily insects and other invertebrates (e.g., slugs, worms, grubs). Slender glass lizards are also reported to eat the eggs of small ground nesting birds and baby rodents on occasion.

6.4 Question 4: Should I keep a lizard that I caught while on vacation/hiking as a pet?

Lizards that are native to Wisconsin tend to do poorly in captivity without special knowledge of keeping reptiles as pets. Most will refuse to eat and eventually starve to death if kept in a terrarium. Furthermore, the slender glass lizard is an endangered species in Wisconsin and it is illegal to possess them for any reason, including as a pet, without an Endangered and Threatened Species Permit. All lizards have some regulations covering their collection, for more information on Wisconsin DNR amphibian and reptile regulations please visit: <http://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/er/ER0102.pdf>.

6.5 Question 5: I caught a lizard while on a hike/vacation and its tail fell off. Will it die?

No. Lizards are capable of something called *caudal autotomy*. Essentially, this means that they can voluntarily break off their own tail, due to its unique anatomical design, when threatened. It is believed the broken tail gives the lizards a chance to escape from predators. The tail, after it is broken off, continues to twitch. It has been proposed that this distracts predators, and while they focus on the twitching tail, the lizard is able to escape. The lizard is able to regenerate (i.e., re-grow) its tail after some time.

6.6 Question 6: How is the slender glass lizard different from a snake?

Although they appear similar, there are two anatomical features that make glass lizards easy to distinguish from snakes. First, glass lizards have eyelids (which snakes do not), so they can blink. Second, glass lizards have a visible auricular (ear) opening on either side of the head, which appears looks similar to a pit behind the corner of the mouth.

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