

A Modern-Day Dragon

What do the words *giant lizard* make you think of? One of the enormous dinosaurs that once roamed the land? Or maybe the imaginary dragons from fairy tales and fantasy films? None of those lizards actually exist in our world, but there is a rather large lizard that does. It's even got dragon in its name.

Komodo dragons are the largest and heaviest lizards living on Earth. The biggest on record measured 10.3 feet (3.13 meters) in length and weighed 366 pounds (166 kilograms). But generally, these creatures are smaller, at about 8 feet (2.5 meters) long and weighing about 200 pounds (91 kilograms).

Like all lizards (and dragons), Komodo dragons have teeth, scaly skin, four legs, clawed feet, and a long tail. They can't fly like



dragons. But like many other lizards, they can climb and swim. They also move like their smaller relatives, twisting from side to side, using their tails for balance. This movement comes from the placement of their legs. Lizards' legs stick out to the side, rather than under their bodies. This **arrangement** doesn't slow up Komodo dragons. They can reach speeds of 11 mph (18 kph) for short distances.

Something else the Komodo dragon has in common with



The Komodo dragon uses its long forked tongue to "smell" the air.

dragons and smaller lizards is a long forked tongue. It uses its tongue to "smell" the air. If the wind is right, it can smell a dead animal up to 5 miles (8.5 kilometers) away.

The Komodo dragon cannot breathe fire, but its mouth contains a different weapon. Its bite is poisonous. This causes **fatal** infections in any prey that manages to escape. The Komodo dragon then tracks down the poisoned animal.

There are 3,000-5,000 wild Komodo dragons living at any one time, all on volcanic islands in **Indonesia**. They are named for the largest of these islands, Komodo.

According to fossil evidence, these **creatures** originated 25 to 40 million years ago. But the Komodo dragon was unknown to most of the world until about 100 years ago. Then some Dutch **soldiers** had a run-in with one and sent its photograph to a nearby zoo.

Now the world knows that there really are dragons.



Indonesia is made up of thousands of islands.

A Modern-Day Dragon

KEY VOCABULARY

- **Komodo** (proper noun) *Komodo* is the name of a large island in Indonesia and a lizard that gets its name from the island.
- **arrangement** (noun) An *arrangement* is the way things are positioned.
- **fatal** (adjective) *Fatal* means causing something to die.
- **Indonesia** (proper noun) *Indonesia* is the name of a country.
- **creatures** (noun) A *creature* is an animal or other being.
- **soldiers** (noun) A *soldier* is a person who serves in an army.

Where do Komodo dragons live?

Explain how Komodo dragons hunt for food.

Insert a photo of a Komodo dragon with body parts labeled (google image)

How are Komodo dragons different from dragons in fairy tales?

Would you want a Komodo dragon as a pet? Why or why not?

