

Introduced Species



Varanus tsukamotoi

Photo ● Robert F. Myers

This handsomely-spotted lizard is often mistakenly called an iguana, however, Micronesia has no true iguanas. The monitor lizard, or “hilitai” as it is called in Chamorro, has a pattern of yellow or white spots on a dark green background which blends in perfectly with jungle leaves.

Like kulepbla (brown tree snakes), hilitai have scales that are arranged in neat rows and overlap like shingles or fit closely together like tiles. They are also cold-blooded. This means that their body temperature is the same as the temperature of their surroundings. They are often seen laying in the sun on rocks and logs in order to stay warm.

No one knows how the hilitai got to Guam but it is certain that they have been in Micronesia for a long time. They are very well adapted to island living and can run with considerable speed, climb trees, dig holes and swim.

A three-foot (90 cm) long hilitai is about average size. Deep in the jungle they may grow to four or five feet (1.2-1.5 m). These reptiles will eat almost anything that they can catch including insects, snails, smaller lizards, rats, crabs, birds, bird eggs and dead animals. They can even catch fish in the water.

The hilitai digs a hole under a rock or tree for a nesting den. In this hole, the female will lay between eight to 12 eggs, each about the size of a chicken's egg, but with a soft, leather-like shell.

They are found everywhere on Guam although their numbers may have decreased due to hunting and predation of humans.



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