

River Lizard

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The river lizard or water lizard (*Anolis vermiculatus*) owes its common name to the habit of living close to the waters of rivers or streams, to which it is released at the slightest symptom of danger. It is also known as a lizard, caiman, river caiman, water chameleon or river chipoyo.

It presents a yellowish gray color that can change to lighter, in correspondence to the place where it is or to its state of mind it can present a dark chromed color and the greenish belly. Its hind legs are equipped with dermal lobes that function as fins, which increase the surface area of support over the water. These are rolled up when the animal walks on land. Its gular scarf does not reach great dimension, it is transverse instead of longitudinal. The female is smaller than the male and very different from the male in shape and colour, as if it were another species. The female has a remarkable sexual dimorphism. They are 31 to 37 cm long.

It lives in rivers and streams in the province of Pinar del Río, Soroa and Sierra de los Órganos. They are viviparous and the female spawns near the rivers, not even to perform this function away from the water. They lurk and hunt butterflies, dragonflies, crickets, tadpoles and fish from small heights on trees and rocks on the banks of streams.

This lizard is almost totally amphibious. In this environment it performs very well, swims and dives perfectly, and is able to move its long hind legs so quickly that it manages to run over the surface of the water. If the animal faces danger it begins to run very quickly over the surface of a river or lake, then the fins of its hind feet open allowing it to increase its supporting surface and thus run over the water. However, as its speed decreases, it sinks and has to swim in the normal way of any other lizard.

Fountain: Fernández Ricardo L. Wonders of Zoology. Reptiles2. Academia Publishing House, 2007.