



# UROMASTYX

## SQUAMATA

**Family:** Agamidae  
**Genus:** *Uromastyx*  
**Species:** *acanthinura*



**Range:** Northern Africa, Saharan desert from Morocco to Sudan

**Habitat:** desert - hilly, rocky areas with good shelter and accessible vegetation

**Niche:** primarily herbivorous but occasionally insects and small lizards, diurnal, terrestrial

**Diet: (wild)** mainly plants (leaves, grasses, flowers) but will consume ants and beetles

**(zoo)** leafy greens, vegetables

**Life Span:** captivity 15-20 years; wild unknown

**Sexual dimorphism:** males tend to have bigger, wider head and more bulky tail. They are more vivid in color but there are “male-mimic” females.

**Location in SF Zoo:** Animal Resource Center

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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Uromastyxs (uros), also known as a spinytails, have a blunt, turtle-like head with strong jaws and a thick-spiked tail; they have 10 to 30 rings of spiked scales covering the topside of their tail, which are used for defense. The body is squat and has strong legs with sharp claws for digging and climbing. Moroccans can have striking colors of orange, yellow, and even washes of lime green or mixtures of all the above. They have eye-like spots on their backs. As with most Uromastyx, they begin life displaying drab tans. The colors also change with stress level and body temperature.

Uros have a remarkable sense of sight. Since the soil in deserts tends to have a high salt content, many plants tend to also have high salt concentrations in their leaves. They commonly eat plants that are salt tolerant. As a result, this species has glands in its nostrils used for eliminating extra salt without eliminating water. They will often have a white flakiness (sometimes known as “lizard sweat”) around their nostrils due to the salt gland. Uros have adapted to very high temperatures.

<b>Weight:</b> .5 - 1 lb. <b>Length:</b> 12” to 18”
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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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Uromastyx are categorized as CITES Appendix II but has not been evaluated by the IUCN. They are protected species in Morocco and a few North African countries. Populations are in decline due to international pet trade, collection for medicinal use, unstable food availability and habitat degradation due to competition with livestock grazing. Road mortality is of great concern as roads are an attractive basking spot for these lizards.

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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Uromastyx are solitary and live in burrows that they dig. They spend most of their waking hours basking in the sun, hiding in underground chambers at daytime or when danger appears. They are a territorial species and will fiercely protect it; males use secretions from their femoral and anal glands to mark their territories upon reaching sexual maturity. Uros will use tactile and chemical cues to find mates and the perfect burrow spot. When startled or defending their territory, the uros will whip their tail, which can deliver a painful blow.

This species hibernates during the winter for two to five months and will aestivate during summer months when there are drought-like conditions. They have been known to run in a zigzag pattern.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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When males court a female, he will often shake his head from side to side and make push-up motions. Once he has finally gotten close enough, the male will use his mouth to hold the female firmly by either her sides or her neck and proceed to copulate.

The Moroccan Uromastyx generally mates in April although the typical mating season lasts from March to July. Eggs are usually laid one month after fertilization occurs in a fairly deep burrow dug by female. It is likely that this species breeds once per year. The young will stay in their burrow for several weeks to months before leaving. The young become independent at 3 -12 weeks.

The Moroccan Uromastyx does not complete metamorphosis. The newly hatched young will often stay within the burrow for a few weeks to a few months before they will set out on their own. The bright colors of this species will usually begin to show at about one year of age though they tend to become brightest at sexual maturity. They reach full size at 8 to 9 years old.

Incubation: 8 -10 weeks # of young: 8 – 23 eggs	Sexual Maturity: 4 years Weight at birth: .2 oz. Length at birth: 2 in. (not including tail)
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## MISCELLANEOUS

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The Moroccan Uromastyx was one of the first Uromastyx species imported into North America and was the first species successfully reproduced in herpetoculture.

This species acts as prey to many birds, snakes, wolves, and monitor lizards and thus these supports local populations.

Known predators are wolves, dogs, shrikes, raptors, monitors and snakes.

### Sources:

[http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Uromastyx\\_acanthinura/](http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Uromastyx_acanthinura/)  
<http://reptile-database.reptarium.cz/species?genus=Uromastyx&species=acanthinura>  
<http://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/31335-Uromastyx-acanthinura>

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