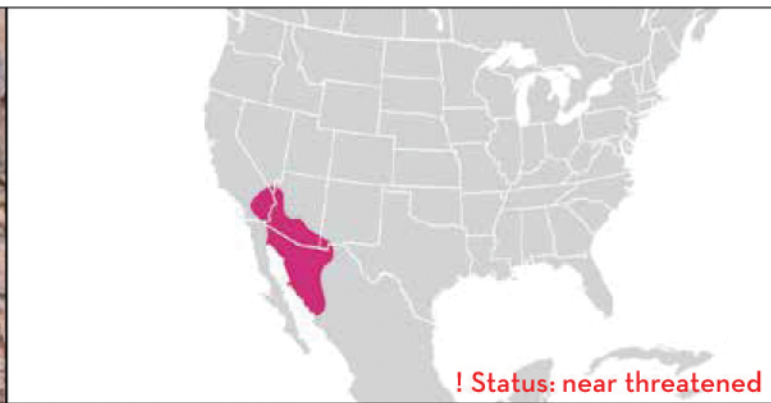


GILA MONSTER

updated March 2017



! Status: near threatened

Range	Southern Nevada and California, Arizona to New Mexico and Mexico
Habitat	Arid to semi arid regions of gravelly and sandy soils, especially areas with some shrubs and moisture
Diet (wild)	Nesting rodents and rabbits, eggs, lizards, birds
Diet (captivity)	Dead rodents
Description	Length: 24 inches; weight: 3–5 pounds. Body is squat and heavy with large head. Scales are beaded yellow, pink, and black. The broad head, chin, and neck are black, as well as the legs and feet. Black eyes have round pupils. Scales have a granular surface, providing excellent camouflage with texture and color among the desert sand and pebbles. Short but sharp claws are made for digging. The tail is short and thick.
Lifespan	20–30 years
Reproduction	The female lays a clutch of 1–12 eggs in a hole dug with her forefeet, which she then covers with sand. The eggs remain about 5 inches under the surface, where the sun heats the sand and warms them. After about four months, the young break free and crawl to the surface. Hatchlings are 4 inches long. Juvenile coloring is more vivid than that of adults. Mating usually takes place in early summer and may last up to an hour.
Behavior	Slow moving and awkward, Gila monsters are unable to catch anything but eggs and newborn animals. They search for prey by following trails with their tongues and Jacobson's organs. Gila monsters may spend more than 95 percent of their time in burrows, coming out only to feed and occasionally sun themselves.
Our animals	1 female, 1 male. Born: 10/1992 at Woodland Park Zoological Gardens, Seattle, Wash.
Cool stuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronounced "hee-la." • Gila monsters are the only venomous lizards native to the United States and one of only two known species of venomous lizards in North America; the other being their close relative, the Mexican beaded lizard. Beaded lizards are the largest lizards in North America. • Although Gila monsters' venom, a neurotoxin, is as toxic as that of a coral snake, they only produce only small amounts. Gila monster bites are not fatal to healthy adult humans and there are no recorded instances of human deaths due to Gila monster venom. • Gila monster venom does not seem to be important for hunting; most prey are small enough to be subdued with jaws and teeth. Unlike many snakes, which inject venom into their prey, Gila monsters essentially chew the venom into the open wound when they bite. This is because the venom travels from the salivary glands down grooves in the teeth in the lower jaw. • Only about 100 of the more than 5,000 known lizard species use venom; these include the Gila monsters, monitor lizards, Komodo dragons, legless lizards and iguanas. • Their tails are short and thick, containing a fat store enabling Gila monsters to survive periods of food scarcity. • It is illegal for the Gila monster to be captured or held in the states where it exists.

Phylum
ChordataClass
ReptiliaOrder
SquamataFamily
HelodermatidaeGenus
Helodermaspecies
H. suspectum