

Outdoor Recreation

is

Outdoor Education

Gila Monster (*Heloderma suspectum*)

The Gila monster, (pronounced HEE-la), is the largest lizard native to the U.S. and is one of very few poisonous lizards in the world. The *Heloderma suspectum*, helo is Greek for a nail head or stud; *derma* means skin. *Suspectum* comes from early suspicion that the lizard was venomous.

Gila monsters are named for the Gila River Basin in Arizona, but also occur in southeastern California, southern Nevada, Utah, far southwest New Mexico and northwestern Mexico.

Gila monster distribution is spotty, clustered around mountain ranges. They are found in desert mountain foothills and brushy arroyos or canyon bottoms that extend down into valleys.

Gila monsters prefer relatively cool temperatures compared to other desert lizards. They are most active in spring, exiting their burrows in the morning, avoiding hot afternoons and perhaps hunting again in the evenings. During the hotter months, Gila monsters may be active near dawn and dusk and at night after rains.



Learning About New Mexico's Wildlife

Gila Monster



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

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