

Eating with Gila Monsters

Imagine you are a lizard with beady-looking black scales and orange or red patterns on your body. You have a long tongue and sharp teeth. It has been many months since you had something to eat, and you can feel that your tail is very thin and light. You're no ordinary lizard. You're a Gila Monster, and you are hungry. You decide it's time to hunt for food.

How do these lizards that live in the deserts of North America find enough to eat? Hunting can be difficult in such a harsh environment where few things grow or live. Gila Monsters do find food. They flick their tongues in and out to search for food by tasting and sniffing the air. These extra-sensitive tongues help them to find small animals in the sand. They can also find birds and their eggs. Breaking eggshells is easy for Gila Monsters because they have strong jaws and pointed teeth.

Gila Monsters have a special hunting weapon: venom. Venom is a poison some animals can produce to protect themselves or capture prey. When Gila Monsters bite and make a deep wound on another animal, such as a mouse, venom seeps from a gland on their lower jaws. Gila Monsters lock their strong jaws and sharp teeth into the prey and grind, spreading venom throughout the bodies of their victims. If food is scarce, Gila Monsters can store fat in their tails for months, but when the tails grow thin, it is time to hunt again.

1. Gila Monsters hunt for food with their:
 - A. extra-sensitive tongues.
 - B. poisonous venom.

- C. pointed teeth.
- D. strong jaws.

Justifications.

- A. Correct. *extra-sensitive tongues*. This is not too obvious because other body parts aid the Gila Monsters in the hunting and eating process, and these are mentioned in the document. The examinee must read carefully to realize which body part helps the Gila Monsters find food.
- B. Incorrect. *poisonous venom*. The poisonous venom is what kills the prey. This distractor is attractive because the examinee will need to clarify between how the Gila Monsters hunt and how they kill their captured prey.
- C. Incorrect. *pointed teeth*. The document states the following: “These extra-sensitive tongues help them to find small animals in the sand. They can also find birds and their eggs. Breaking eggshells is easy for Gila Monsters because they have strong jaws and pointed teeth.” This distractor is attractive because of its proximity to the correct answer.
- D. Incorrect. *strong jaws*. The document states: “Gila Monsters lock their strong jaws and sharp teeth into the prey and grind, spreading venom throughout the bodies of their victims.” This distractor is attractive because the examinee may need to re-read about how the jaws lock onto prey, making sure that this is not a part of the Gila Monsters’ search process.

- 2. A sign that a Gila Monster needs to find food is when:

- A. baby birds are getting ready to hatch.
- B. its beady-looking scales change patterns.
- C. its tail is thin and light.
- D. the desert has a lot of prey.

Justifications.

- A. Incorrect. *baby birds are getting ready to hatch*. The document states the following:
“They can also find birds and their eggs. Breaking eggshells is easy for Gila Monsters because they have strong jaws and pointed teeth.” This distractor is attractive because the bird eggs are part of a Gila Monster’s diet, so the examinee may need to re-read to be sure this is not an indicator of when to hunt.
- B. Incorrect. *its beady-looking scales change patterns*. The patterns on a Gila Monster do not change or indicate a need to hunt. This distractor is attractive because the document does mention “beady-looking black scales and orange or red patterns” on a Gila Monster.
- C. Correct. *its tail is thin and light*. The document states: “If food is scarce, Gila Monsters can store fat in their tails for months, but when the tails grow thin, it is time to hunt again.” This is not too obvious because many Gila Monster characteristics are mentioned, so the examinee will need to read carefully to recall how a Gila Monster stores fat in its tail.
- D. Incorrect. *the desert has a lot of prey*. The document does not mention when the desert may be most abundant in terms of prey for Gila Monsters. This distractor is attractive because it does mention the desert environment (“How do these lizards that

live in the deserts of North America find enough to eat? Hunting can be difficult in such a harsh environment where few things grow or live”); therefore, the examinee may need to re-read for certainty.

Sources

Dennard, Deborah. *Lizards*. Chanhassen, Minnesota: NorthWord Press, 2003.

Facklam, Margery. *Lizards: Weird and Wonderful*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2003.

“Gilas Monsters.” Desert USA http://www.desertusa.com/sep97/du_gilamonster.html 23
February 2010