

For Creative Minds

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St. Croix and Surrounding Islands



The Caribbean is a sea between North and South America. St. Croix is one of more than 7,000 islands in the Caribbean Sea.

There are 28 island countries in the Caribbean. But St. Croix is not an independent country. It is part of the US Virgin Islands, a territory of the United States. Puerto Rico is also a US territory.



Map Questions

1. The Dominican Republic is on the same island as what other country?
2. What ocean is to the east of the Caribbean Sea?
3. What country is just south of Florida?
4. What island or cay is south of St. Croix?
5. Where is Buck Island in relation to St. Croix?



St. Croix Ground Lizards

The St. Croix ground lizard is a St. Croix native. In fact, these lizards are **endemic** to St. Croix. That means that they are not naturally found anywhere in the world except for St. Croix.

St. Croix ground lizards currently live on four islands: Protestant Cay, Green Cay, Ruth Island and Buck Island. Long ago, Protestant Cay and Green Cay were part of the island of St. Croix. These two cays are part of the lizards' natural habitat. The lizards live on Ruth Island and Buck Island only because they have been taken there by people. This is called a **conservation translocation**.

These lizards are critically endangered. If we do not help them, they could become extinct.

Adaptations

Adaptations are changes that allow some animals to survive better than other animals in their environment. Physical adaptations affect the animals' bodies. Animal parents pass these adaptations on to their young. The young animals grow up and pass their adaptations on to kids of their own. Behavioral adaptations affect the way the animals act.

Like many other animals, St. Croix ground lizards use physical and behavioral adaptations to search for food and avoid predators. Sort the following traits into physical or behavioral.

1.

St. Croix ground lizards have light brown, dark brown, and white stripes down their back. This pattern helps the lizards hide in the leaves.

2.

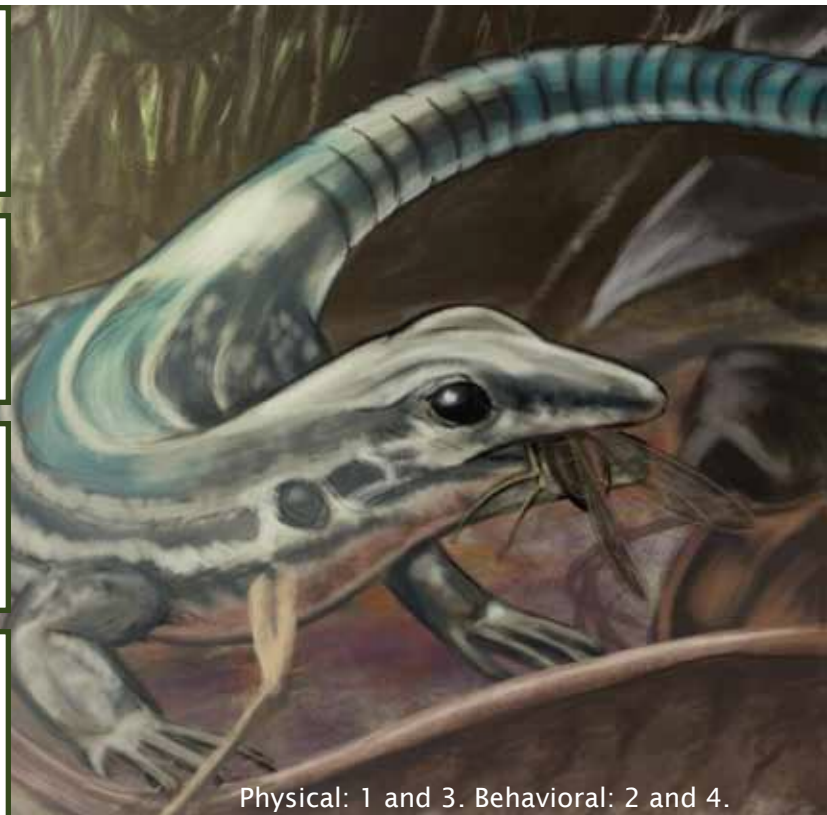
St. Croix ground lizards race into underground burrows to hide from predators.

3.

St. Croix ground lizards have a forked tongue to smell things around them.

4.

St. Croix ground lizards sniff the ground to find food or other lizards.



Physical: 1 and 3. Behavioral: 2 and 4.

Invasive Species

In the late 1800s, farmers in St. Croix brought Indian mongooses to get rid of rats on the island. These small, furry mammals might be cute, but they are among the top ten most harmful **invasive species**. Invasive species are not native animals. They cause problems for native animals or the environment.

Mongoose are predators, and they are destructive. They have eaten so many St. Croix ground lizards that we are in danger of losing this species forever. Mongooses also chomp down on the eggs of lots of other animals, like sea turtles and sea birds.

Today, mongooses live on about 99% of the land in the Caribbean. They are mostly found on the larger islands. We can conserve native animals by helping them move to small islands without any mongooses.

Invasive Species often

- hunt native species
- reproduce quickly
- spread out to cover a wide territory
- can live in many different types of habitats
- are often introduced to an area by humans



Dr. Angeli and her team have come up with ways to save the St. Croix ground lizard from extinction. They need to be creative to find conservation methods that don't cost a lot of money. They find or create areas where no mongooses live or where mongooses are separated from the lizards by a fence. In the future, Dr. Angeli hopes to return the St. Croix ground lizards to St. Croix.

