

Postures of the Military Dragon (*Ctenophorus isolepis*) in Relation to Substrate Temperature

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The ability of lizards to behaviorally thermoregulate by changing position or posture has been recognized since the pioneering work of Cowles and Bogert (1944). Many subsequent workers have inferred that lizards make postural adjustments to alter heat flux (e.g., Fitch, 1956; Heath, 1965; Bartholomew, 1966; Mayhew, 1968; Heatwole, 1970; Brattstrom, 1971; DeWitt, 1971; Louw and Holm, 1972), but in only a few cases has the relationship between temperature and posture been quantified (e.g., Bradshaw and Main, 1968; Muth, 1977). Bradshaw and Main (1968) found little difference in the thermoregulatory behavior of four Australian agamids in the genera *Pogona* and *Ctenophorus* (generic assignments following Storr et al., 1983) despite marked differences in size and ecology. Here I report on thermal correlates of postural changes in a closely related species, the military dragon, *Ctenophorus isolepis*.

Observations were made on 266 *C. isolepis* encountered in the desert in the township of Yulara, Northern Territory, Australia (25°S, 126°E) during 24 Sept-5 Oct and 1-7 Nov 1985. Lizards were spotted and flushed as I walked in the narrow spaces between spinifex clumps. The following information was noted for each lizard: shaded air temperature 1 cm above the sand in the open, ground temperature at the spot where the lizard stopped (measured by placing the thermometer so that the bulb was just covered by sand), and body postures adopted after the lizard stopped. When a lizard stopped in the shade, ground temperature in the open was also recorded. Temperatures were taken with a cloacal thermometer (Miller and Weber, Inc.), which has a maximum reading of 50 C°. Some data could not be determined because lizards ran partially or completely out of sight. Lizard behavior is analyzed with regard to ground temperature (T_g), though air temperature, wind speed, and other factors also influence the operative environmental temperature affecting the lizard (Bakken and Gates, 1975).

Four distinct lizard postures appear to indicate the importance of T_g : (1) In the early morning, when T_g was low, lizards lay completely flat on the ground. (2) More commonly in the morning, and in the late afternoon and the shade at midday, lizards sat with forelegs semi-extended, lifting the forequarters off the sand. Feet, hindlegs, and tail were in contact with the ground. (3) At higher ground temperatures, the toes of all four feet were also lifted off the sand, so that only the palms of the feet were touching the surface. Some or all of the tail was also lifted off the ground. On some occasions, the rump was also raised above the sand so that the weight of the body rested on the base of the tail and palms of the feet (see Pianka [1985] fig. 10). (4) When ground

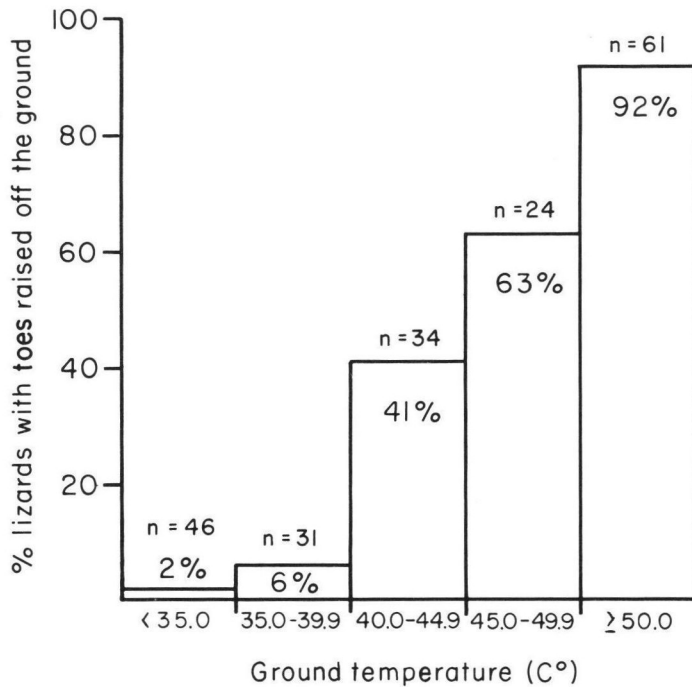


Figure 1. Percentage of lizards that lifted their toes at different ground temperatures. The responses of lizards that stopped in both sun and shade, and thus experienced different ground temperatures, are recorded for both locations.

temperatures were very high ($> 50\text{ C}^\circ$), all four legs were extended, lifting the body entirely off the sand. The tail was rigid and held above the ground as well. Only the palms of the feet touched the ground. On one occasion, a lizard lifted a foot completely off the ground.

The effect of T_g on posture can be seen by examining the incidence of toe- and tail-lifting at different T_g . Data for lizards in the sun and in the shade were similar and are combined for these analyses. In both cases, the frequency in which the appendage is lifted is dependent on T_g where the lizard stopped (chi-square test, $p < .0005$; figs. 1 and 2).

Comparisons of foot and tail posture of lizards that first stopped in the sun and then moved to the shade or vice versa, and of lizards that were only partially in the shade, also indicate that lizards respond to T_g . Of 37 lizards that had their feet up when in the sun, 25 placed them flat on the ground while in the shade. None of the 27 lizards that had their feet down in the sun raised them in the shade ($p < .01$, G-test). Similarly, 30 of 41 lizards had their tails up in the sun and down in the shade, while none of the 23 lizards with tail down in the sun raised it in the shade ($p < .01$, G-test).

Fourteen lizards with part of the tail in the sun had the exposed portion raised and