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Global Warming May Lead To Mass Extinction Of Viviparous Lizards

By Staff Reporter | March 10, 2013 4:27 AM EDT



Dozens of species of lizards could become extinct within the next 50 years. (Photo: University of Exeter, U.K.)

Climate change may lead to the extinction of several species of lizards within the next 50 years, a [new study](#) has stated.

Some lizards have gained the ability to give birth to live young ones, a key

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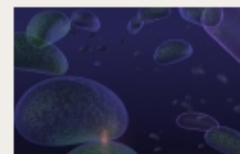
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factor for successful adaptation in cooler climates. But the increase in global temperatures is posing a major threat to the survival of these viviparous lizards, the researchers said.

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The study was carried out by researchers from the University of Exeter and the University of Lincoln, U.K. They investigated *Liolaemus* lizards - a diverse group of vertebrates that belong to the South American lizard family *Liolaemidae*.

These lizards have successfully evolved to reproduce through viviparity (live birth) from oviparity (laying eggs), to survive in cold climates. The process of evolving to viviparity is mostly irreversible, which means that the lizards will not be able to live in warmer environmental conditions.

For their study, the research team analyzed the evolutionary transition of *Liolaemus* lizards from oviparity to viviparity and the impact of climate change on their reproductive modes. They found that the increase in global temperatures is reducing the South American habitat of these *Liolaemus* lizards.

The lizards are forced to either move up into the colder climes of the Andes, or down towards the South Pole, as a result of global warming, NBC News reported. If this trend continues, the *Liolaemus* lizards would end up in natural competition with warm-climate lizards, which are also expanding in the same regions. This could lead to the extinction of viviparous lizards within the next few decades, the researchers said.

Viviparity, which was once considered as a key trait for their evolutionary success, could ultimately lead to multiple events of extinction, they warned.

"These lizards are one of the most diverse groups of animals, and are able to adapt to remarkably diverse conditions. Unfortunately, a reduction in cold environments will reduce their areas of existence, which means that their successful evolutionary history may turn into a double-edged sword of adaptation. Their extinctions would be an atrocious loss to biodiversity," lead author Dr. Daniel Pincheira-Donoso, from the University of Lincoln's School of Life Sciences, said in a statement.

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of Life Sciences, said in a statement.

The findings of the study are published in the journal [Global Ecology and Biogeography](#).

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