The colourful lizards

Dear children,

Have a look at this gila monster. Can you tell me what is special about this lizard? Yes, it's very colourful, and far more colourful than many other lizards, like these rather dull brown monitor lizards. And why do you think the gila monster is so colourful; how do the colours help this lizard? A clue is that it is poisonous.







Yes, the colours warn other animals not to attack and eat it because it is poisonous. Most scientists who study lizards think that the gila monster is the only type of lizard in the world that uses colours to warn other animals that its poison is dangerous.







The Honey Badger and I think that these scientists are wrong because the gila monster is not the only lizard with bold and colourful bodies. Have a look at the lizards below; which ones do you think are warning other animals of a hidden weapon like poison?





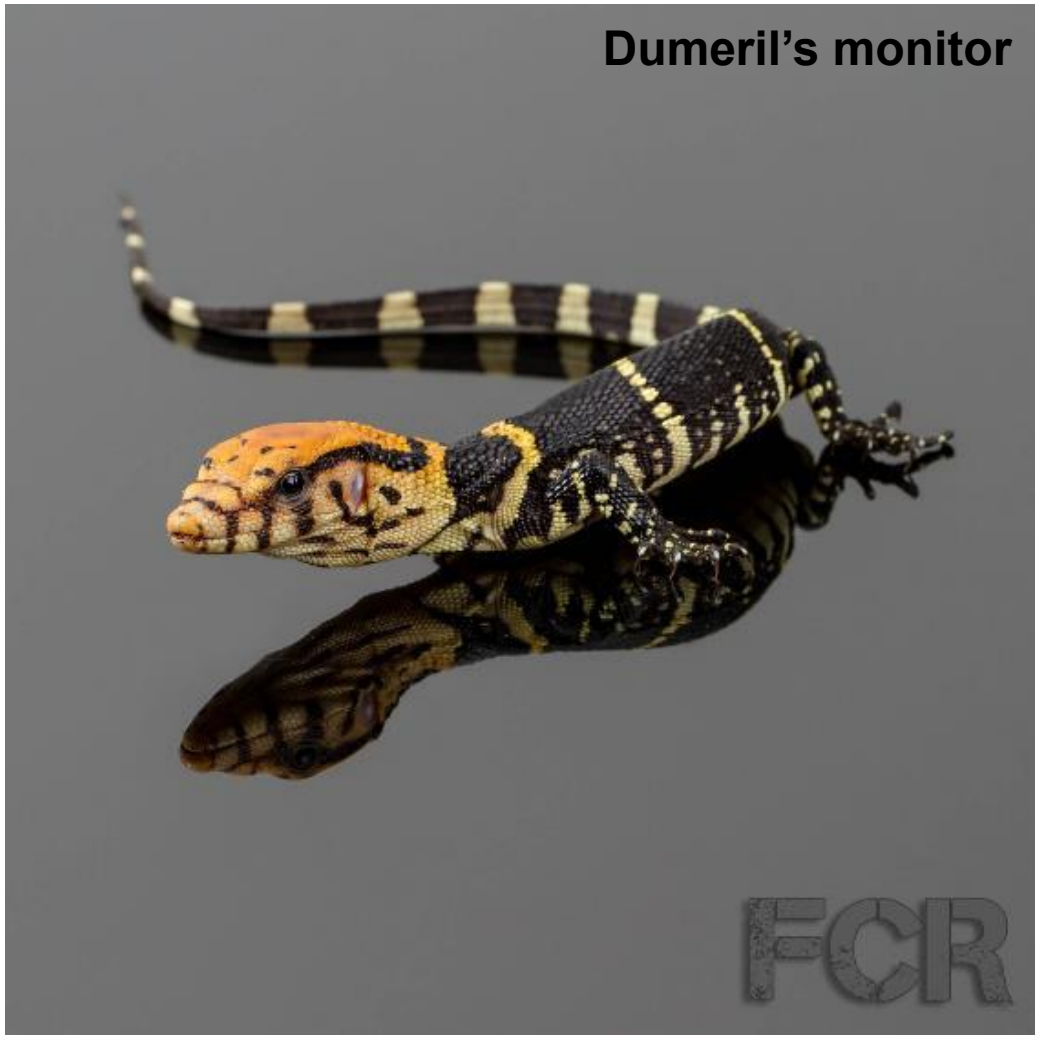






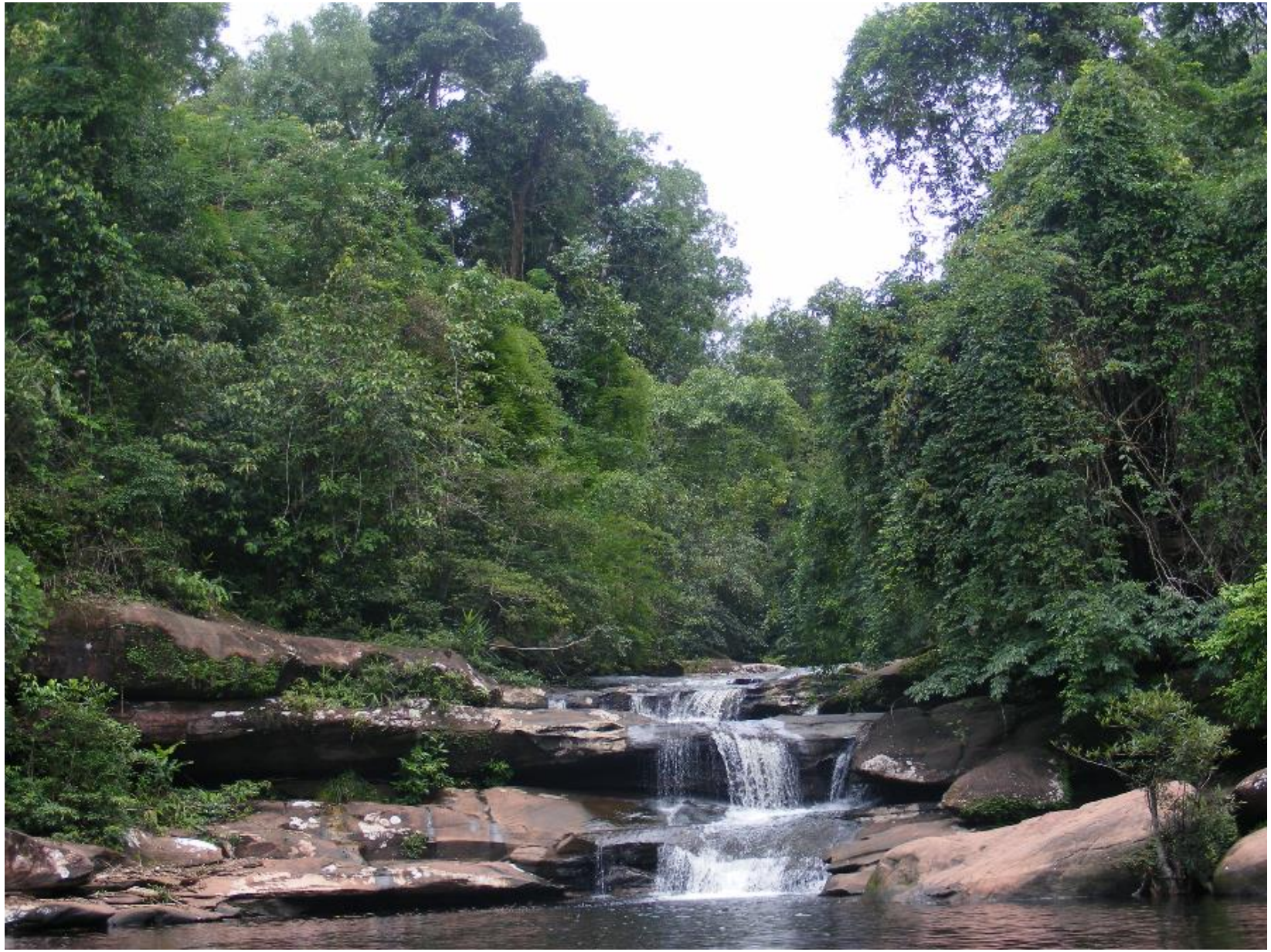
Yes, well spotted. These are both baby monitor lizards; this one is called Bell’s lace monitor, which lives in eucalyptus forests in Australia, and this one is called Dumeril’s monitor, which lives in forests near the sea in places like Thailand. Do you think these baby lizards are using their colours and bold patterns to warn other animals not to attack them?





The Honey Badger and I think so; but nobody knows whether they are poisonous or not. It's interesting that the baby lizards are much more colourful than their parents. Perhaps the babies are more likely to be attacked by other animals and need poison to defend themselves more than the adults do? Scientists still need to test whether the baby and adult lizards are poisonous or not. If one of you become a scientist, perhaps you could go on a field trip into the forests of Australia and Thailand to find these lizards and work out whether they are poisonous or not. That would be fun work to do, wouldn't it?

Best wishes from the Bio-edge,



Robin