

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

COPE'S LEOPARD LIZARD
Family: CROTAPHYTIDAE
R096

Gambelia copeii
Order: SQUAMATA

Class: REPTILIA

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Within California, *Gambelia copeii* is only found in a small area in the extreme southern portion of San Diego County, approximately 70 km², centered on Campo and Potrero Valleys (Mahrtdt et al. 2010). Personal communications with R. Fisher and C. Mahrtdt make note that Cope's leopard lizard occur in open areas within mixed chaparral and sage scrub habitats (Thomson et al. 2016).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Primarily an ambush predator, which pursues arthropods and other lizards, including whiptail lizards, zebra-tailed lizards, and side-blotched lizards (McGuire 1996, Grismer 2002). Young lizards may rely exclusively upon arthropods and other insects for food.

Cover: As a defensive mechanism, *C. copeii* employ the "freeze" behavior, such that when threatened, they hide under a bush or thicket, flatten themselves, and remains still (Tevis 1994, McGuire 1996). Otherwise, they quickly retreat to a nearby small mammal burrow, if present.

Reproduction: Cope's leopard lizards are egg layers like other leopard lizards.

Water: Not required as lizards get most of their water from food organisms. In captivity, leopard lizards have been observed to lap up water droplets on objects in their cages.

Pattern: Usually found in sparsely vegetated open habitat, basking under the sun or moving between different clumps of vegetation (McGuire 1996, Thomson et al. 2016). Small mammal burrows may be important for cover and hibernation.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Diurnal, emerges early to bask; can be found basking on small stones and roadside berms (McGuire 1996, Nafis 2018). As early as mid-March, *G. copeii* emerges from hibernation and can remain active through September (Grismer 2002). Based on other leopard lizard species, *G. copeii* probably obtains an optimum body temperature earlier in the day than its vertebrate prey species to enhance foraging abilities. Surface activity appears to be correlated with daily air temperatures consistently over 90°F.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Non-migratory

Reproduction: Breeding season begins March or April and continues to July; eggs are most likely laid during the summer (McGuire 1996, Nafis 2018). Mean clutch size is about five, with a possibility of two or more clutches in optimal years (Goldberg et al. 2010).

Home Range: No information.

Territory: Appears to be non-territorial, however more ecological data is needed (McGuire 1996).

Niche: Predators likely include coachwhip snake, patch-nosed snake, raptors, loggerhead shrike, greater roadrunner, and any number of carnivorous mammals. The large size of this lizard makes it more vulnerable to potential predators.

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