

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

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SLENDER SALAMANDER

Batrachoseps major

Family: PLETHODONTIDAE

Order: CAUDATA

Class: AMPHIBIA

A013

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

What was *Batrachoseps pacificus major* is now recognized as its own species, *Batrachoseps major*. Current phylogenetic research indicates that what was *Batrachoseps aridus* now belongs as a subspecies of *B. major*, called *B. major aridus*. *B. major aridus* (endangered desert slender salamander) is found only in Hidden Palm Canyon, a tributary of Deep Canyon, and nearby Guadalupe Canyon, Riverside Co., at an elevation of 750 m (2500 ft) (Stebbins 2003). The entire population of this species may be less than 1,000 individuals. Habitats occupied include barren, palm oasis, desert wash, and desert scrub. The 57 ha (141 ac) Hidden Palm Ecological Reserve is the only known habitat of this salamander (California Department of Fish and Game 1980). *B. major major* and other subspecies are distributed along the southern California coast from Los Angeles Co. south to San Diego Co. and east to elevations of 1500 m (5000 ft) in the Santa Monica, San Gabriel and San Bernardino mountains (Stebbins 2003). Habitats occupied by *B. major* include oak woodland, chaparral, and grasslands of washes, canyons and mountain slopes.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: No information, but probably takes a variety of small arthropods, annelids, and molluscs.

Cover: *B. major aridus* occurs under limestone sheets, rocks, and talus, usually at the base of shaded, water-soaked, north- and west-facing cliff-like walls (Brame 1970). *B. major* found under rocks, bark and logs where there is sandy or gravelly soil, and formerly common in gardens under stones, boards and potted plants (Stebbins 2003).

Reproduction: Egg-laying occurs in fall and winter.

Water: Always associated with moist seepages.

Pattern: Prefers moist areas with rocky cover.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Nocturnal surface activity during the wetter periods of winter and spring. During wetter, cooler months (late winter, early spring) *B. major aridus* individuals may be found primarily under rocks, but appear to retreat to moist areas underneath limestone slabs by late summer (Brame 1970).

Seasonal Movements/Migration: None.

Home Range: Unknown, but probably small (less than one acre).

Territory: Unknown.

Reproduction: Little information. Related forms lay eggs in clusters of from 4 to 21 (Stebbins 1954).

Niche: No data.

Comments: The limestone sheets utilized by *B. major aridus* may be critical as cover during summer. Destruction of these sheets by collectors, or other human activities, could cause the extinction of the entire species.

REFERENCES

- Brame, A. H., Jr. 1970. A new species of *Batrachoseps* (slender salamander) from the desert of southern California. *Los Angeles Co. Mus. Contrib. Sci.* 200:1-11.
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- Stebbins, R. C. 1954. *Amphibians and reptiles of western North America*. McGraw-Hill, New York. 536pp.
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