

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

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**COMMON CHUCKWALLA**

*Sauromalus ater*

Family: IGUANIDAE  
R011

Order: SQUAMATA

Class: REPTILIA

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**DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY**

The chuckwalla is widely distributed throughout most of the Mojave, Sonoran and Colorado deserts from sea level to 1400 m (4600 ft) (Macey and Papenfuss 1991). It is found in a variety of desert woodland and scrub habitats but is most frequently associated with, and reaches highest densities, in creosote communities. It is restricted to areas with large rocks, boulder piles, or large rock outcrops on slopes. It is less frequently found on flats. This lizard is active from mid-spring to mid-summer and occasionally in fall. Densities of chuckwallas have ranged from 7 to 14 per ha (3 to 6 per ac) (Shaw 1939, Stebbins 1954, Johnson 1965, Nagy 1971, Berry 1974).

**SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS**

**Feeding:** The chuckwalla is herbivorous, feeding on flowers, fruits and leaves of creosote and, to a lesser extent, on other perennials and annuals (Shaw 1939, Stebbins 1954, Berry 1974).

**Cover:** This species requires rocky cover such as large rock outcrops, boulder piles or scattered large rocks, usually on a slope but often on a flat (Stebbins 1954).

**Reproduction:** This species lays eggs, and friable, sandy, well-drained soil is required for nesting. In years of less than average rainfall and low plant productivity, reproduction may not occur (Stebbins 1954, Berry 1974).

**Water:** Not required.

**Pattern:** This lizard is found in a variety of habitats but most frequently, and in greatest density, in creosote, exclusively in rocky areas. It is herbivorous and requires the presence of perennial or annual plants, and rocks for shelter.

**SPECIES LIFE HISTORY**

**Activity Patterns:** This species can be active all year in warm areas, but most activity occurs in spring and early summer (late March to July). Lizards bask on exposed rocks early in the day, then forage or engage in social behavior. The hottest part of the day involves basking or retreat into rock crevices. Afternoon activity may occur in mild weather. The peak of foraging and reproductive activity is from late April to early June.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** This species is not known to migrate.

**Home Range:** Home ranges of males averaged 1.9 ha (4.8 ac) and ranged from 1-3.3 ha (2.5-8.3 ac); female ranges were smaller (Berry 1974).

**Territory:** Males and females defend territories. Males tolerate the presence of females

in their territories (Berry 1974).

**Reproduction:** Breeding occurs from April to June with a peak of activity in late April to May. Clutch size ranges from 6-13, average 8 eggs. Females may produce one clutch in 2 or 3 years (Johnson 1965, Berry 1974).

**Niche:** There are no reports of predation on this lizard but they are probably taken by coyotes and other mammalian predators, larger avian predators, and possibly snakes. Adverse weather can result in no reproduction.

## REFERENCES

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Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHRR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F. Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.