

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

COMMON SAGEBRUSH LIZARD

Sceloporus graciosus

Family: PHRYNOSOMATIDAE
R023

Order: SQUAMATA

Class: REPTILIA

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Widely distributed in montane chaparral, hardwood and conifer habitats, eastside pine and juniper habitats, and Great Basin shrub habitats of the Cascades and Sierra Nevada, and also east of the Sierra-Cascade crest in northern California. Isolated populations exist at Sutter Buttes in the Sacramento Valley, in the Coast Ranges along the entire length of the state, in the mountains of southern California, and in the desert mountains of Inyo County. Elevation: 900-3200 m (3000-10,400 ft).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Rose (1976a) found that in the central Coast Ranges sagebrush lizards took almost exclusively small arthropods, especially ants and beetles. A wide variety of other insects, as well as spiders, ticks, mites, scorpions, and other arthropods are also taken. Cannibalism has been reported.

Cover: When disturbed these lizards most often take cover in dense, low growing bushes or shrubs. They also hide in mammal burrows, rock crevices, and under surface objects. Individuals bask on the ground, on low branches of bushes, on low boulders. Mammal burrows and rock crevices may serve as hibernation sites during cold periods.

Reproduction: Eggs are laid a few centimeters deep in nests dug in loose soil by the female. Nests are usually located near the base of shrubs (Nussbaum et al. 1983).

Water: No information on water requirements. Does not require permanent water.

Pattern: The sagebrush lizard occurs in a wide variety of open forest and shrub habitat types, chiefly above 900 m (3000 ft).

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Activity is almost exclusively diurnal. The length of the warm-season activity varies geographically and from year to year, but at most localities individuals are active from March or April to late September or early October. Juveniles appear to be active later in the fall than adults.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Significant seasonal movement or migration has not been reported for this species. Lizards may occasionally move outside the normal area of activity to find suitable nest sites for egg-laying, or to find hibernation sites.

Home Range: Males are more active, especially in spring (Ferguson 1971), and have larger home ranges (Stebbins 1944) than females. Stebbins (1944) reported the average longest overland movement for males during one year was 24 m (82 ft), while that for females

was 18 m (59 ft).

Territory: Males defend territories both during and after the reproductive season (Ferguson 1971). An area with a length of up to 7.5 m (25 ft) is vigorously defended from rival conspecific males, especially during the reproductive season. Territorial defense is accomplished by posturing and physical combat.

Reproduction: The reproductive season usually extends from late May to July. Egg-laying usually occurs in June or July (Stebbins 1954), and females lay between 2 and 7 eggs with larger females producing the most eggs. Goldberg (1975) reported that a large percentage of the females in the mountains of southern California lay two clutches of eggs per year. Newly emergent hatchlings have been observed from mid-August to late September. Ferguson (1971) reported that some individuals may form long-term pair bonds.

Niche: The sagebrush lizard is common in most habitats where it occurs. Some competition for food resources may occur with sympatric *S. occidentalis*. Considerable dietary overlap has been observed where the two species coexist (Rose 1976b). Differential microhabitat use resulting in minimal spatial overlap apparently allows the two species to co-occur. Sagebrush lizards are important prey items for a variety of vertebrate species, including snakes (especially striped whipsnakes and night snakes) and predatory birds.

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R023

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