

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

---

DESERT HORNED LIZARD

*Phrynosoma platyrhinos*

Family: PHRYNOSOMATIDAE  
R030

Order: SQUAMATA

Class: REPTILIA

Written by: M. Marangio

Reviewed by: T. Papenfuss

Edited by: R. Duke, J. Harris

Updated by: CWHR Program Staff, March 2000

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The desert horned lizard is a common yearlong resident in the Mojave, Sonoran and Colorado deserts (Behler and King 1979) as well as in the northeastern corner of the state. An isolated population exists in San Jacinto River Wash, Riverside Co. (Stebbins 1972). It occurs in all desert shrub types and grass/forb stages of pine-juniper woodlands. Sparse or open habitats are preferred by the desert horned lizard. Its elevational range extends from below sea level to 2130 m (7000 ft) (Macey and Papenfuss 1991). This species is most active from April to July in lower elevations and from May to September in higher areas.

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Feeds primarily on ants, also beetles and their larvae, and plant material (Leviton 1972). Forages in rocky and sandy areas (Lawrence and Wilhoft 1958, Shaw 1950), generally sitting and waiting for prey (Pianka and Parker 1975).

**Cover:** Sandy soil is preferred for burrowing but also found in sandy-gravelly drainage channels (Stebbins 1954).

**Reproduction:** Eggs are laid in well-drained sandy soil.

**Water:** Obtains water from food.

**Pattern:** Found primarily on sandy and gravelly flats, often in areas of wind-blown sand or along washes in arid and semiarid regions (Stebbins 1954).

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Diurnal (Leviton 1972). Most active April to July at lower elevations, May to September at higher elevations. Hibernates during cool season.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** None.

**Home Range:** 18-22.5 m (59-74 ft) in diameter (Pianka and Parker 1975).

**Territory:** Poorly developed (Tanner and Krogh 1973), but this species uses assertive displays (Tollestrup 1981).

**Reproduction:** Breeds May to June. Most eggs are laid in June and early July. Clutch size 7-13 eggs (Taylor 1912).

Niche: This species overlaps in range with the flat-tailed horned lizard. One record of predation by prairie falcon (Stebbins 1954); probably eaten by roadrunners and hawks. Leopard lizards and snakes may prey on this species, but antipredator displays are often effective (Tollestrup 1981).

#### REFERENCES

- Behler, J. L., and F. W. King. 1979. The Audubon Society field guide to North American Reptiles and amphibians. Alfred Knopf, New York. 743pp.
- Lawrence, J., and D. Wilhoft. 1958. Cryptic coloration in lower-dwelling horned lizards. *Copeia* 1958: 43-44.
- Leviton, A. E. 1972. Reptiles and amphibians of North America. Doubleday and Co., New York. 250pp.
- Macey, J. R. and T. J. Papenfuss. 1991. Reptiles. Pages 291-360 in C.A. Hall, Jr., editor. Natural History of the White-Inyo Range eastern California. Univ. Calif. Press, Berkeley, California. 536 pp.
- Pianka, E. R., and W. S. Parker. 1975. Ecology of horned lizards: a review with special reference to *Phrynosoma platyrhinos*. *Copeia* 1975:141-162.
- Shaw, C. E. 1950. The lizards of San Diego County with descriptions and key. *Bull. Zool. Soc. San Diego* 25:1-100.
- Stebbins, R. C. 1954. Amphibians and reptiles of western North America. McGraw-Hill, New York. 536pp.
- Stebbins, R. C. 1972. California amphibians and reptiles. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 152pp.
- Tanner, W. W., and J. E. Krogh. 1973. Ecology of *Phrynosoma platyrhinos* at the Nevada Test Site, Nye County, Nevada. *Herpetologica* 29:327-342.
- Taylor, W. P. 1912. Field notes on amphibians, reptiles, and birds of northern Humboldt County, Nevada, with a discussion of the faunal features of the region. *Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool.* 7:319-436.
- Tollestrup, K. 1981. The social behavior and displays of two species of horned lizards, *Phrynosoma platyrhinos* and *Phrynosoma coronatum*. *Herpetologica* 37:130-141.

R030

---

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) 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.