

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

DESERT NIGHT LIZARD

Xantusia vigilis

Family: XANTUSIIDAE
R034

Order: SQUAMATA

Class: REPTILIA

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The desert night lizard is widely distributed in arid and semiarid areas of the Mojave and Colorado deserts as well as in the Central and South Coast ranges. It is most common in Joshua tree and desert scrub habitats. Found in association with yucca, foothill pine, chamise, pinyon pine and juniper. This is a secretive lizard, spending most of its time in and under yucca logs and other cover. Reports of abundance range from 47 per ha (19 per ac) to 16,000 per ha (6400 per ac) in very localized conditions (Miller 1951). This species is found at elevations of 300 to 2070 m (990 to 6800 ft) (Macey and Papenfuss 1991). Activity may begin in early April at low elevations and last until early fall, while emergence may be retarded until late spring at higher elevations.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: This lizard eats termites, orthopterans, small beetles, homopterans, hemipterans, collembolans, moths, caterpillars, flies, ants, ticks, and spiders. It waits for prey items that wander into the cover area and seldom searches actively (Brattstrom 1952, Stebbins 1954)

Cover: Most commonly this species is found under and in logs of the several species of yucca, and much less frequently under logs and debris of digger pine, root channels of creosote, and other natural or unnatural cover objects (Brattstrom 1952, Stebbins 1954).

Reproduction: Courtship and parturition take place in the shelter of yucca logs or whatever cover is utilized.

Water: Probably does not require water but will drink in captivity.

Pattern: The desert night lizard is secretive and reclusive. It feeds, reproduces, and lives most of its life under cover (usually yucca logs). It is difficult to overestimate the importance of cover to this species.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Populations of desert night lizards at low elevations become active in early April and remain so until late summer, while higher-elevation populations may not become active until May. Daily activity patterns are difficult to determine, due to secretive behavior. Laboratory studies have demonstrated that the desert night lizard is diurnal (LaPointe 1966, Mautz and Case 1974).

Seasonal Movements/Migration: None.

Home Range: The home range is restricted to the cover site and the area immediately adjacent to it (Miller 1951).

Territory: Both males and females are territorial during the breeding season (Miller 1951).

Reproduction: Copulation occurs in late spring and egg development takes about 3 months. The young are born in September and October with an average of 2 young in a brood (range 1-3). The mother attends the young for a short time after birth (Cowles 1944, Miller 1948, 1951, Stebbins 1954).

Niche: Predators probably include most larger lizards (*Crotaphytus*, *Gambelia*, *Sceloporus*, etc.), many snakes, and predatory birds. This species rarely occurs away from cover, and the most commonly-used cover objects are yucca logs. Replacement of yucca logs is slow and their destruction by collectors can have a deleterious impact on local populations.

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