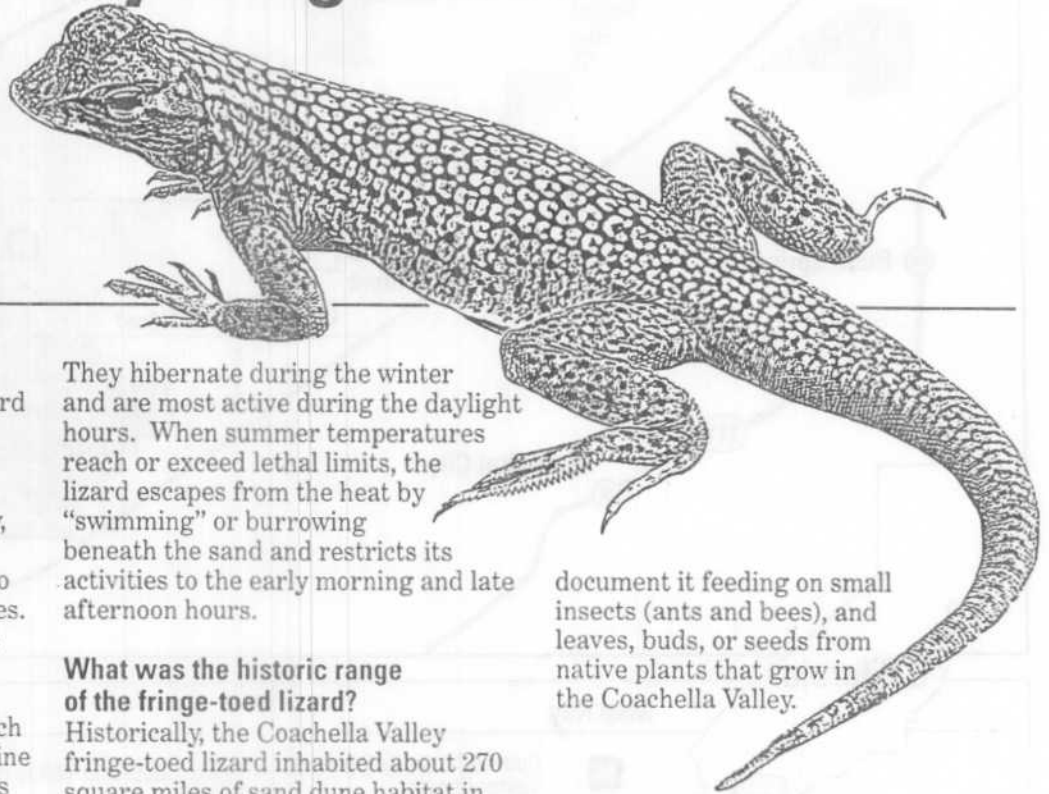


Coachella Valley Fringe-Toed Lizard Facts

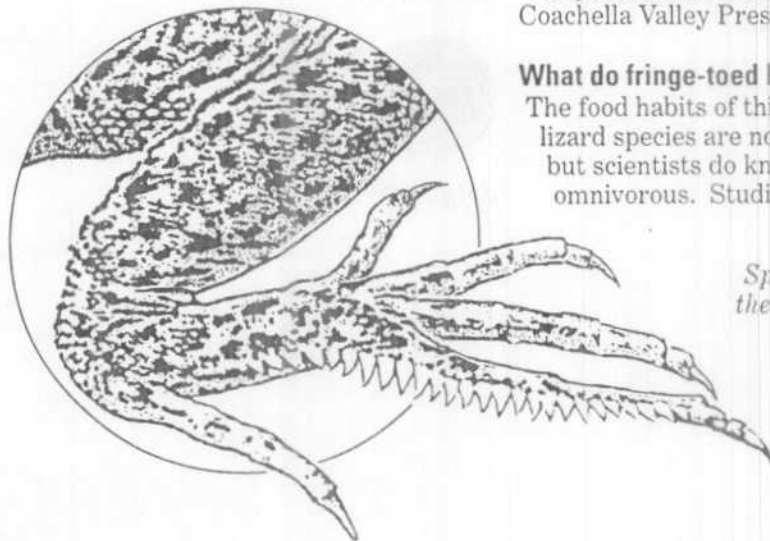
(Uma inornata)



What is the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard?

The Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard (*Uma inornata*) is a small, highly specialized reptile that inhabits the windblown desert regions of the Coachella Valley in Riverside County, California. It derives its common name not only from its home, but also from the enlarged scales along its toes. This lizard has adapted other unique forms and structures to enable it to survive in the harsh desert habitat including a wedged-shaped nose which enables it to burrow through loose, fine sand, elongated scales cover the ears to keep out blowing sand, and specialized nostrils that allow it to breathe below the sand without inhaling sand particles.

The Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard has a whitish or sand-colored back and belly, with a light pattern of eye-like markings that form shoulder stripes. Fringe-toed lizards average 6 to 9 inches in length. Breeding occurs from late April through mid-August. Little is known about the location and timing of egg laying, however hatchlings begin to appear from late June to early September.



Special scales on the hind feet allow the lizard to "swim" across loose sand.

They hibernate during the winter and are most active during the daylight hours. When summer temperatures reach or exceed lethal limits, the lizard escapes from the heat by "swimming" or burrowing beneath the sand and restricts its activities to the early morning and late afternoon hours.

What was the historic range of the fringe-toed lizard?

Historically, the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard inhabited about 270 square miles of sand dune habitat in Coachella Valley, California. The sand dunes, often referred to as "blowsand" habitat, consist of fine sand that accumulates at the bottom of drainages during flood events and is transported across the Coachella Valley by high winds that continually blow through the area. Today the fringe-toed lizard habitat has been reduced to about 50 square miles, but only about 19 square miles of this land continues to receive the naturally occurring "blowsand" that is essential to the long-term survival of the lizard. One of the largest remaining populations of the lizard is found within the Coachella Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Coachella Valley Preserve.

What do fringe-toed lizards eat?

The food habits of this fringe-toed lizard species are not well studied, but scientists do know that it is omnivorous. Studies of the lizard

document it feeding on small insects (ants and bees), and leaves, buds, or seeds from native plants that grow in the Coachella Valley.

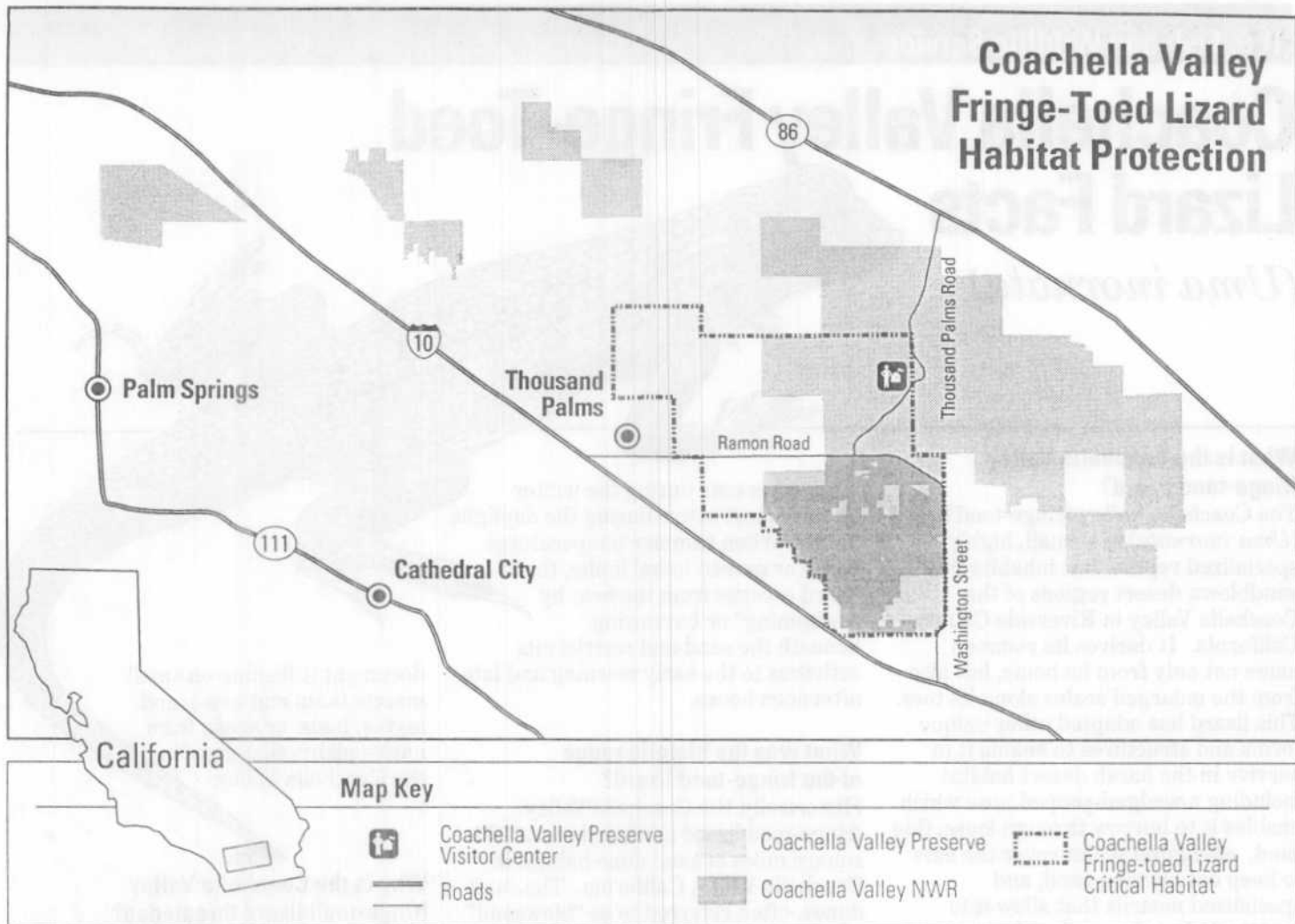
Why is the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard threatened?

The Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard is threatened by a continual loss of habitat from human development. The majority of the lizard's historic habitat has been eliminated or degraded because of the direct and indirect effects of development. Structures erected on the sand transport corridor areas and the introduction of non-native, invasive plant species (including tamarisk) are stabilizing the once free moving sand deposits, preventing the continued replenishment of the "blowsand" habitat which the lizard relies on for its long-term survival.

What is being done to save the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard as threatened, under the Endangered Species Act, in 1980. It is listed as an endangered species by the State of California. At the time the Service listed the lizard as threatened, about 12,000 acres of critical habitat were designated. This acreage includes the areas with the highest lizard concentrations and a source for the "blowsand" habitat on which the lizard depends for its long-term survival.

Coachella Valley Fringe-Toed Lizard Habitat Protection



(continued from front)

The 3,709-acre Coachella Valley National Wildlife Refuge was established by the Service in 1985 to protect the lizard. The Coachella Valley Preserve, cooperatively managed by The Nature Conservancy, Bureau of Land Management, California Department of Parks and Recreation, California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Center for Natural Lands Management, encompasses an additional 16,405 acres of fringe-toed lizard habitat adjacent to the refuge.

What more can be done to secure the long-term survival of the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard?

Protection of the sand source for the "blowsand" ecosystem on which the lizard depends is very important to the long-term conservation of this native desert species. The Service is initiating a planning effort with Federal, tribal, state, and local partners to look at alternative means to protect the sand source and transport area that feed the dunes on the refuge.

For more information contact:
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