

BLUNT-NOSED LEOPARD LIZARD (*GAMBELIA SILA*)

Federal/California status: Endangered/Endangered

DFG: Fully protected



Description

The blunt-nosed leopard lizard is a relatively large lizard with a long tail; long, powerful hind limbs; and a short, blunt snout. Males are larger than females, ranging about 3-5 inches (75 mm to 125 mm) from snout to vent; females range about 3-4.5 inches (75 mm to 113 mm).

Blunt-nosed leopard lizards vary tremendously in color and patterns on the back. Background color ranges from yellowish or light gray-brown to dark brown depending on the surrounding soil color and vegetation. They are uniformly white underneath.

The pattern on the back consists of rows of dark spots interrupted by a series of from 7 to 10 white, cream-colored, or yellow bands. The bands may fade and the spots may become smaller and more numerous as the lizards age. Young lizards have blood-red spots on the back that darken with age, becoming brown when sexual maturity is reached, although the spots on some adults retain reddish centers.

Females in breeding condition have bright red-orange markings on the sides of the head and body and the undersides of the thighs and tail. This color fades to pink or light orange by late July. Males in many populations develop a breeding color that spreads over the entire undersides of the body and limbs. This salmon to bright rusty-red color may be maintained indefinitely.

They are most active when ground temperatures are between about 72 and 97 F. Smaller lizards emerge from hibernation earlier in the year than adults, stay active later in the year, and become active earlier and later in the day than adults.

Adults are active above ground from about March or April through June or July. Beginning in August or September, adults are no longer active above ground. However, hatchlings remain active above ground until October or November, depending on weather. Lizards are most likely to be seen in the morning and late afternoon, when air temperatures are between 74 and 104 F and surface temperatures are between 72 and 122 F.

Leopard lizards use small rodent burrows for shelter from predators and extreme temperatures. Burrows are usually abandoned ground squirrel tunnels, or occupied or abandoned kangaroo rat tunnels. Each lizard will use several burrows without preference, but will avoid those occupied by predators or other leopard lizards.

Habitat

Blunt-nosed leopard lizards currently occupy scattered parcels of undeveloped land on the San Joaquin Valley floor, and in the foothills of the Coast Range. Within this range, these lizards can be found in open, sparsely vegetated low areas. On the Valley floor, they are most commonly found in Non-native Grassland and Valley Sink Scrub habitats. They also occur in foothill habitats, including Valley Saltbush Scrub.

Range/distribution

Blunt-nosed leopard lizards are found in Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, and Tulare counties.

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Photos

