

# **SQUAMATA** (Lizards)

## **Iguanas**



## **Spinys**



## **Whiptails**



## **Collards**



## **Skinks**



## **Beadeds**



**(38 Families Worldwide)**



# Family IGUANIDAE (Iguanas)

## Chuckwalla (*Sauromalus ater*)

### Measurements:

Average Length: 16" SVL: 9" Average Weight: 1.5 lbs

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

large, stocky body; thick tail tapers to a blunt tip; loose folds of skin around neck and sides; color and patterns highly variable by habitat and terrain: (m) dark head, neck, chest, legs; larger than females; (f) usually bands on back/tail; more slender than male

### Notes:

common; found in rocky areas throughout Mojave Desert, into Sonoran Desert to nw Mexico; diurnal; primarily herbivorous, occasionally eats insects; when disturbed, hides in crevice, inflates body to wedge itself in; often performs push ups as display of aggression, courtship, or social status; hibernates in winter

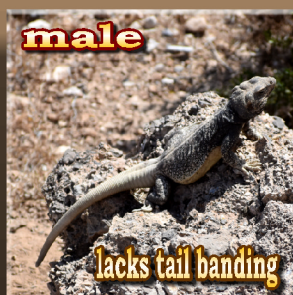
Mojave presence: native



Red Spg; Red Rock NCA, NV



Red Spg; Red Rock NCA, NV



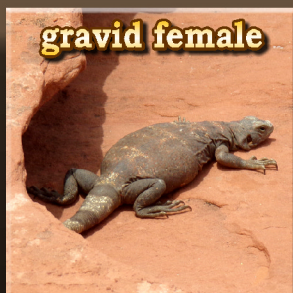
Hoover Dam Lodge; LMNRA



Hoover Dam Lodge; LMNRA



Hoover Dam; Lake Mead NRA



Valley of Fire SP; NV



Valley of Fire SP; NV



Hoover Dam; Lake Mead NRA

### Comments

In areas such as the [Valley of Fire State Park](#) in NV, chuckies have become rather habituated to human admirers. This strategically perched fellow saw me coming with my camera and literally rushed down the side of the sandstone formation to pose for me! He graciously presented himself until I was done, then resumed his station atop the rock. Moments like this are priceless!





# Family IGUANIDAE (Iguanas)

## Desert Iguana (*Dipsosaurus dorsalis*)

### Measurements:

Average Length: 14" SVL: 6"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

relatively large size; brown pattern imposed on tan body color; long, finely banded tail; small head with blunt snout; single ridge of scales down center of back

### Notes:

common in creosote bush scrubland throughout Mojave and Sonoran Deserts; diurnal, tolerant of the high desert temperatures; primarily herbivorous, preferring fruits and leaves (especially creosote bush flowers), but will also take insects; both genders essentially identical

Mojave presence: native



perfect camouflage

Valley of Fire SP; NV



coloration matches habitat

Valley of Fire SP; NV



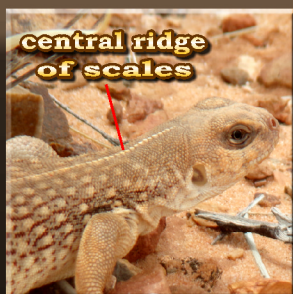
small head, blunt snout

Lake Mead NRA; NV



alert and fast

Lake Mead NRA; NV



central ridge of scales

Valley of Fire SP; NV



characteristic patterning

Valley of Fire SP; NV



favorite habitat:  
creosote scrub

Lake Mead NRA; NV



can tolerate high heat...

...but still enjoys the shade!

Lake Mead NRA; NV

### Comments:

Desert Iguanas are skittish and fast. They race off for cover under a creosote bush or anything else growing in the vicinity before you even know they were nearby, which makes them hard to approach and photograph. Every now and then, you get lucky.

This inquisitive youngster in the [Lake Mead National Recreation Area](#) near the Hoover Dam Lodge ran lickety split for cover...then returned for a curious peek!





# Family PHRYNOSOMATIDAE (Horned Lizards)

## Northern Desert Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma platyrhinos platyrhinos*)



**inquisitive and docile**

Bare Mountain; Beatty, NV



**enjoying a welcomed scratch on the chin**

Bare Mountain; Beatty, NV

### Measurements:

Average Length: 5" SVL: 4"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

wide, flat body; long thin spines along back of head (unattached at base), shorter on back and sides; blunt snout; color ranges from tan, brown, to reddish with darker wavy blotches; genders similar

### Notes:

uncommon; found in arid environments from se OR, ID, and Wy south through NV and UT; diurnal; diet consists primarily of ants, other insects; slow manner and gentle temperament; often performs push ups as display of aggression, courtship, or social status; will inflate body when threatened

**Mojave presence:** native



**perfect camouflage**

Bare Mountain; Beatty, NV



**long spines on head**

Bare Mountain; Beatty, NV

## Southern Desert Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma platyrhinos calidarium*)



**crown of long thick spines unattached at base**

Hualapai Reservation; GCNP

### Measurements:

Average Length: 5" SVL: 4"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

wide, flat body; long thin spines along back of head (unattached at base), shorter on back and sides; blunt snout; color ranges from tan, brown, to reddish with darker wavy blotches; genders similar

### Notes:

uncommon; occurs from s NV and UT, se CA, w AZ, and nw MEX\*; eats primarily harvester ants, plus other insects and spiders; diurnal; slow runner; squirts blood from its eyes when threatened; uses head bobbing or push ups to attract mate

(\* distinguished from northern variety only by location)

**Mojave presence:** native



**perfect camouflage**

Hualapai Reservation; GCNP



**standing tall and proud**

Hualapai Reservation; GCNP



**slow, gentle manner**

Hualapai Reservation; GCNP



# Family PHRYNOSOMATIDAE (Side-Blotched, Zebras)

## Side-Blotched Lizard (*Uta stansburiana*)



Salt Creek; Death Valley NP

### Measurements:

Average Length: 5.5" SVL: 2.5"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

black blotch usually present behind forelimbs; conspicuous folds of skin around neck; gray to olive color usually with blue/white spots on back; often bobs head; females smaller and drab

### Notes:

very common; thrives from w Washington south to n Mexico and east to UT and AZ; diurnal; insectivorous; fast and usually skittish; breeding males occur in 3 conspicuous morphs depending on sexual strategy (each with varying strengths and weaknesses): blue throated (faithful guard), yellow throated (sneaky cuckold), and orange throated (aggressive usurper)

Mojave presence: native



Red Rock Canyon NCA; NV



Salt Creek; Death Valley NP



Valley of Fire SP; NV

## Zebra-Tailed Lizard (*Callisaurus draconoides*)

### Measurements:

Average Length: 8" SVL: 4"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

tan to gray body with buff specks and 2 rows of dark spots down back; long gray tail with conspicuous black bands; long, slender limbs; (m) 2 black bars on sides that extend into blue fringe on belly; (f) faint to no bars, and no blue

### Notes:

common; found throughout sw US and nw Mexico; diurnal, can tolerate high temperatures; insectivorous, some vegetation; fastest lizard in Mojave, curling tail over body while running

Mojave presence: native



Dolan Springs, Arizona



Coyote Springs, Nevada



Goodsprings, Nevada



Halloran Springs, California



# Family PHRYNOSOMATIDAE (Spiny Lizards)

## Yellow-Backed Spiny Lizard (*Sceloporus uniformis*)

### Measurements:

Average Length: 11" SVL: 5.75"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

tan to brown with black and yellow stripes or mottling on back; spiny scales; black collar around neck and throat; (m) blue patches on belly and throat; (breeding f) orange head, lacks blue

### Notes:

common; native to Mojave and Great Basin deserts; diurnal; preys primarily on insects, also spiders, small lizards, flowers, berries, etc.; originally considered a subspecies of *S. magister* (essentially identical, except for occurrence; rarely east of the Colorado River)

Mojave presence: native



Corn Crk; DNWR; NV



Red Rock NCA; NV



Corn Crk; DNWR; NV



Red Rock NCA; NV



China Ranch; Tecopa, CA

### Comments:

Yellow-backs are generally rather drab colored throughout most of the year (left) until springtime when the females develop distinctive orange heads (above left), while males begin to sport their courtship attire highlighted by bright blue throats (right).



Red Spring; RRNCA; NV



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV

These heavy-bodied lizards are natural tree lubbers (right), but in rugged areas with few to no trees, rocks and other hiding/basking spots will do quite nicely (left).



Corn Creek; Desert NWR; NV



# Family **PHRYNOSOMATIDAE** (Spiny Lizards)

## Desert Spiny Lizard (*Sceloporus magister*)

### Measurements:

Average Length: 10" SVL: 5.25"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

stout size; body tan to blue-gray or brown with dark spots and rough, spiny scales; black collar around neck and throat; (m) blue patches on belly and throat; (breeding f) orange head, lacks blue

### Notes:

common; found in s NV and UT, most of AZ east to TX, s to Sinaloa, Mexico; diurnal; mainly insectivorous, but will also take spiders, small lizards, etc.; color changes seasonally from lighter shades to darker (and vice versa) to regulate body temperature

**Mojave presence:** native; rare (extreme eastern)



Mohave Co., Arizona



Mohave Co., Arizona



Colorado River; GCNP



US 93; Mohave Co., Arizona



# Family PHRYNOSOMATIDAE (Spiny Lizards)

## Sagebrush Lizard (*Sceloporus graciosus*)



Red Rock NCA; Nevada



Valley of Fire SP; Nevada

### Measurements:

Average Length: 6" SVL: 3.5"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

tan to brown with rows of splotches down back, but color and patterns highly variable by region and habitat; smoother scales than most Sceloporids; (m) blue patches on belly and usually throat; often orange breeding colors; (f) white to yellow on belly

### Notes:

very common; found throughout most of the western US in various habitats; preys on insects, spiders, and are in turn a major source of food for snakes and birds-of-prey; easily confused with Western Fence Lizard, but are smaller, smoother scaled, and more skittish

Mojave presence: native



Corn Creek; DNWR; Nevada



Red Rock NCA; Nevada

## Western Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*)

### Measurements:

Average Length: 8" SVL: 3.75"

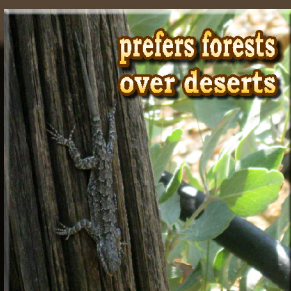
### Distinguishing field characteristics:

gray-brown with chevron pattern on back; blue patches on throat and belly, yellow on underside of limbs; (f) lacks blue

### Notes:

common, but skittish, thus seldom seen (often disregarded as the more common Sagebrush Lizard); ranges throughout w NA from Washington south to n Mexico, east to ID, NV, AZ (avoids harsh deserts; found at higher elevations); diurnal; eats insects, spiders

Mojave presence: native



Cerbat Mtns; Chloride, AZ



Cerbat Mtns; Chloride, AZ



# Family PHRYNOSOMATIDAE (Fringe-Toed Lizards)

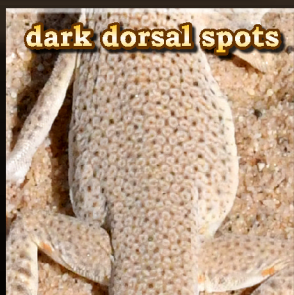
## Mohave Fringe-Toed Lizard (*Uma scoparia*)



Kelso Dunes; Kelso, CA



Kelso Dunes; Kelso, CA



### Measurements:

Average Length: 6" SVL: 3.5"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

pale tan with small dark spots on dorsal side; granular, smooth scales; protruding lips gives face a wedged appearance; fringes on toes; dark spot on side of belly behind forelimbs

### Notes:

common locally, but vulnerable; native to the Mojave Desert exclusively in areas that contain sand dunes (e.g. Dumont Dunes, Kelso Dunes); diurnal; feeds primarily on insects (ants, beetles, larvae, etc.), also some plant material (buds, leaves, seeds); genders similar except for male's 2 large postanal scales

**Mojave presence:** native; rare

### Comments:

This lizard is remarkably adapted to its sandy environment. Fringed scales on its toes provide for running quickly across sandy surfaces. Interlocking scales on its upper and lower eyelids, ear and nostril flaps, and overlapping upper jaw all serve to prevent the penetration of sand when the lizard digs in to escape predators. The comical-looking wedged face caused by the overlapped jaw, reminiscent of a reptilian version of Donald Duck, allows the lizard to infiltrate and essentially "swim" through the loose substrate.

Though these lizards are usually rather timid, this particular little fellow at the Kelso Dunes near Kelso, CA, was actually a curious and willing model. He posed patiently, with little apparent concern, while I moved all around him to get shots from different angles of the sun. Though he should have been hibernating (Nov - Feb), the weather was so perfect in November (2020), he just couldn't resist a last stroll through the neighborhood. A great day for both of us!



Kelso Dunes; Kelso, CA



Kelso Dunes; Kelso, CA





# Family **TEIIDAE** (Whiptails)

## Western Tiger Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tigris*)



orange mid-section

Valley of Fire SP; NV



long, slender tail,  
twice length of body

Clark Mtns; Mtn Pass, CA

### Measurements:

Average Length: 11" SVL: 4-5"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

tan to brown with red-orange mid-section; slender, with thin tail (blue on juveniles) much longer than body; smooth granular scales on back, larger on belly; long, angular head, pointed snout; spots, pale stripes down back (varying from 4-6); various patterns on sides; dark, conspicuous ear openings; both genders similar

### Notes:

very common; nominal species found throughout w US and n Mexico; can tolerate hot, dry conditions; eats insects (butterflies, crickets, beetles, etc.) and arachnids (spiders, scorpions, etc.); 16 subspecies account for extensive variation among populations

Mojave presence: native



triangular head; pointed snout

large ear opening

Red Rock NCA; NV



tolerates hot daytime  
summer temperatures

Salt Creek; Death Valley NP

## Great Basin Tiger Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tigris tigris*)

### Measurements:

Average Length: 11" SVL: 4-5"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

gray to brown; slender, with thin tail much longer than body; long, angular head, pointed snout; 4 pale stripes down back, with spots that merge to form vertical bars on sides; brown mid-section

### Notes:

very common; subspecies of the nominal Western Tiger Whiptail; populates NV, w UT, w AZ, s CA (isolated population in ID-OR region); diurnal, but aestivates in summer; preys on invertebrates, lizards

Mojave presence: native



pointed snout

Red Rock NCA; NV



perfect camouflage

Christmas Tree Pass; NV



vertical bars  
on sides

Red Rock NCA; NV



4 pale stripes  
down back

Red Rock NCA; NV



# Family **TEIIDAE** (Whiptails)

## Plateau Tiger Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tigris punctilinealis*)



Hualapai Plateau; Arizona

### Measurements:

Average Length: 11" SVL: 4-5"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

gray-brown with reddish-brown mid-section; slender, with thin tail much longer than body; long, angular head, pointed snout; 4 pale stripes down back, with spots on sides (no bars like Great Basin Whiptail)



Hualapai Plateau; Arizona



Joshua Forest; Mohave Co.; AZ

### Notes:

very common; subspecies of the nominal Western Tiger Whiptail; restricted to e and s UT, n AZ, extreme nw NM; diurnal; preys on invertebrates, lizards; both genders similar

**Mojave presence:** native (ne region)



Grand wash Cliffs; AZ

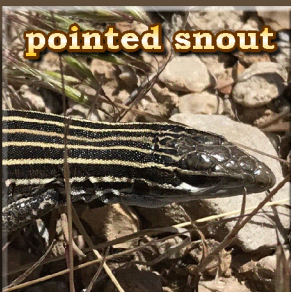
## Desert Grassland Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis uniparens*)

### Measurements:

Average Length: 8" SVL: 3-4"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

long, slender body; dark olive, brown, or black with 6 yellowish stripes down back; slender tail up to 2.5 times longer than body; tail of juveniles is bright blue (dark green in adults)



Grand Wash Cliffs; AZ



Grand Wash Cliffs; AZ

### Notes:

uncommon; occurs in desert to semi-desert grasslands from w AZ east to the Rio Grand River (NM, TX), south into n MEX; diurnal; preys primarily on invertebrates (ants, termites, beetles, etc.); **all individuals are female**, propagating by **parthenogenesis** (asexual reproduction); formerly placed in the genus **Cnemidophorus**

**Mojave presence:** native; rare (Mohave Co., AZ)



Grand Wash Cliffs; AZ



Grand Wash Cliffs; AZ



# Family **SCINCIDAE** (Skinks)

## Gilbert's Skink (*Plestiodon gilberti*)



### Measurements:

Average Length: 9" SVL: 4.5"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

slender olive-green body with small head, shiny scales; short legs;

**breeding:** (m) bright orange head, (f) paler orange



### Notes:

rare; found in higher-elevation riparian habitats in parts of southern CA, Death Valley NP, eastern Mojave Desert; diurnal, but secretive, spending most of its time hidden in underbrush, such as leaves and other plant debris; eats primarily arthropods (insects, arachnids)

**Mojave presence:** native

all photos taken at

**Red Spring**

**Red Rock National Conservation Area**

**near Las Vegas, NV**

### Comments:

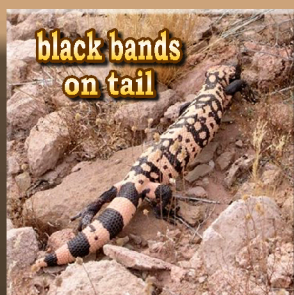
Caught in the throes of passion! A rustle of leaves gave away the presence of these rare lizards. At first it appeared these two were fighting, and that one was trying to eat the other, which is not uncommon in the reptilian world. When they dashed out from under their cover of leaves and debris, and into the sunlight, the motive became quite clear. The larger of the two was the male, and he definitely had amorous intentions. He grabbed hold of the female's neck, wrapped himself around her, then started stroking her back with his rear leg. It was a rare encounter to see Nature at work . . . and so romantic! Spring love is definitely in the air in May at the Red Rock National Conservation Area.





# Family **HELODERMATIDAE** (Beaded Lizards)

## **Gila Monster** (*Heloderma suspectum*)



Lake Mead NRA

### Measurements:

Average Length: 20" SVL: 15" Average Weight: 16 oz

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

large, heavy bodied; massive head, black face, orange-and-black body with bead-like scales; short, fat, orange tail with black bands

### Notes:

rare; reclusive, spending about 90% of its life underground; found in Mojave Desert from CA, NV, UT, through w AZ into n Mexico; dines primarily on bird and lizard eggs, but will also consume insects, arachnids, small mammals, reptiles; 1 of only 3 known venomous lizards, the others being the Mexican Beaded Lizard and the Komodo Dragon (which was once thought to be septic rather than venomous); both genders essentially identical

**Mojave presence:** native; rare



Photo: Chris Meyers

Red Rock NCA; Nevada



# Family **EUBLEPHARIDAE** (Eyelid Geckos)

## Western Banded Gecko (*Coleonyx variegatus*)



Dolan Springs, AZ



Dolan Springs, AZ

### Measurements:

Average Length: 5" SVL: 3"

### Distinguishing field characteristics:

small; pale, translucent body with dark bands/spots; prominent eyes with vertical cat-like pupils and large eyelids; plump tail

### Notes:

commom, but seldom seen; nocturnal (rare daytime appearances); found in scrublands to pinyon-juniper woodlands, canyons, and mountains throughout the Mojave Desert south into nw MEX; 5 subspecies; tiny, smooth scales give the appearance of skin; no toe pads like most other geckos; tail used for fat storage, and can be regrown (unbanded); diet consists of various arthropods, especially spiders and baby scorpions; only species of gecko native to the Mojave Desert

**Mojave presence:** native

### Comments:

While searching for scorpions at night with a mid-wave UV light in Dolans Springs, AZ, I encountered this small resident scurrying about. Until then, I had no idea that this species fluoresces a faint blue! I've never read any references that noted this characteristic; perhaps this is something new to add to our collective knowledge! It's certainly a novel way to hunt for these secretive lizards.



Dolan Springs, AZ



Dolan Springs, AZ