

SQUAMATA (Lizards)

Iguanas



Spinys



Whiptails



Collards



Skinks



Beadeds



(38 Families Worldwide)

Family IGUANIIDAE (Iguanas)

Chuckwalla (*Sauromalus ater*)

female



pale chest

Red Spg; Red Rock NCA, NV

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 the Mojave Desert, into the 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

female



faint bands on back and tail

Red Spg; Red Rock NCA, NV

male



lacks tail banding

Hoover Dam Lodge; LMNRA

male



dark neck and chest

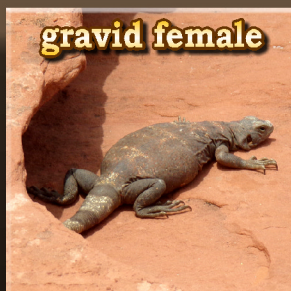
Hoover Dam Lodge; LMNRA

immature



Hoover Dam; Lake Mead NRA

gravid female



Valley of Fire SP; NV

juvenile



Valley of Fire SP; NV

youngster with dad



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



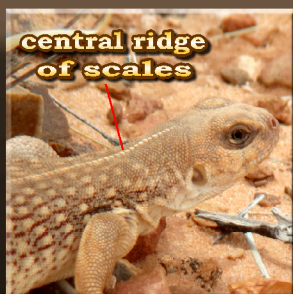
small head, blunt snout

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

Measurements:

Average Length: 5" SVL: 4"

Distinguishing field characteristics:

small; wide, flat body; **long, thin spines** along back of head (**unattached at base**), shorter on back and sides; blunt snout; 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



enjoying a welcomed scratch on the chin

Bare Mountain; Beatty, NV



long spines on head

Bare Mountain; Beatty, NV

Southern Desert Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma platyrhinos calidarium*)

Measurements:

Average Length: 5" SVL: 4"

Distinguishing field characteristics:

small; wide, flat body; **long thin spines** along back of head (**unattached at base**), shorter on back and sides; blunt snout; 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



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

Hualapai Reservation; GCNP



standing tall and proud

Hualapai Reservation; GCNP



perfect camouflage

Hualapai Reservation; GCNP



slow, gentle manner

Hualapai Reservation; GCNP

Family PHRYNOSOMATIDAE (Side-Blotched, Zebras)

Common Side-Blotched Lizard (*Uta stansburiana*)



Salt Creek; Death Valley NP

Measurements:

Average Length: 5.5" SVL: 2.5"

Distinguishing field characteristics:

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



Red Rock Canyon NCA; NV

Notes:

very common; thrives from w Washington south to n Mexico and east to UT and AZ; diurnal; 5 subspecies; insectivorous, primarily insects and spiders; fast and usually skittish; 3 conspicuous morphs for breeding males, 2 for females

Mojave presence: native



Salt Creek; Death Valley NP



Valley of Fire SP; NV

Comments:

"Blotchies" are certainly amongst the most common--if not the most common--lizards you will encounter in the Mojave region. They occur in large numbers as a response to being susceptible to high predation, requiring prolific reproduction. However, numerous as they are, they are not necessarily immediately identifiable. For one, they are understandably very skittish and fast, often disappearing under brush or in a rock crevice without allowing definitive recognition. Secondly, the namesake blotch is not always present. And finally, the species presents the most morphological varieties displayed by any single species. There are three distinct forms for males and two for females, all related to alternative mating strategies. Territorial orange-throat females lay large quantities of smaller eggs, while yellow-throated ones are less territorial and lay fewer, larger eggs. **Orange-throated** males (Aggressive Usurper) establish large territories containing many females; **yellow** ones (Sneaky Cuckold) loiter on the outskirts of orange territories and take advantage of the boss's absence to mate with his gals; and the less aggressive **blue-throated** males (Faithful Guard) are selective in maintaining only a couple females. Each strategy has its advantages and disadvantages. Personally, though I think I look better in blue attire, I believe I'd prefer the yellow's strategy--opportunity without the high maintenance and responsibilities!

Family PHRYNOSOMATIDAE (Side-Blotched, Zebras)

Zebra-Tailed Lizard (*Callisaurus draconoides*)



Dolan Springs, Arizona



Goodsprings, Nevada

Measurements:

Average Length: 8" SVL: 4"

Distinguishing field characteristics:

small; 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; 9 subspecies; diet consists of insects, spiders, smaller lizards, and some vegetation (buds, flowers); fastest lizard in Mojave, curling tail over body while running

Mojave presence: native



Coyote Springs, Nevada



Halloran Springs, California

Comments:

Zebra-tails are among my favorite lizards. They have an appealing character about them. If you startle one, it'll dart away (sometimes on just its hind legs) with its tail curled over its back, then instantly stop on a small rock and perch high on its toes to reassess the situation (upper left and right). If satisfied you're not a danger, it'll actually pose for some rather splendid photos, allowing you to circle around for the best shots before it saunters away to resume its daily business.

Family PHRYNOSOMATIDAE (Spiny Lizards)

Yellow-Backed Spiny Lizard (*Sceloporus uniformis*)

Measurements:

Average Length: 11" SVL: 5.75"

Distinguishing field characteristics:

medium; 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:

medium; 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



Mohave Co., Arizona



Mohave Co., Arizona



Colorado River; GCNP



US 93; Mohave Co., Arizona

Notes:

common; found in s NV and UT, most of AZ east to TX, south 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)

Comments:

The youngster pictured here "invaded" the **Mohave Natural Resources and Lithologic Survey** research center and museum in Dolan Springs, AZ, in November of 2025, the first--and so far only--juvenile of this species I have encountered. I spotted him between two display cases (A), where he immediately took refuge under one, then risked a peek to analyse his predicament (B). After considerable effort and vastly superior patience, I finally captured and detained him in a plastic container (C) before releasing back into the wild, i.e. the front door landscaping (D). He hasn't returned (perhaps lesson learned), but it was a fun and rewarding adventure for me.



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:

small; tan to brown with rows of splotches down back; 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"

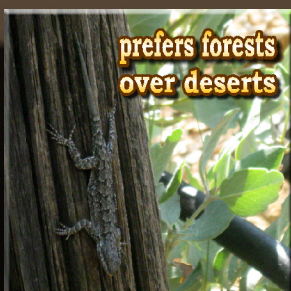
Distinguishing field characteristics:

small; 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)

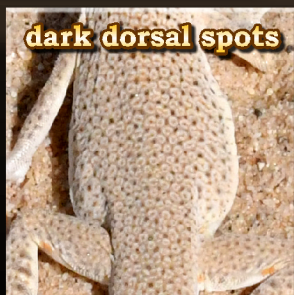
Mohave Fringe-Toed Lizard (*Uma scoparia*)



Kelso Dunes; Kelso, CA



Kelso Dunes; Kelso, CA



Measurements:

Average Length: 6" SVL: 3.5"

Distinguishing field characteristics:

small; 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*)



Valley of Fire SP; NV



Clark Mtns; Mtn Pass, CA

Measurements:

Average Length: 11" SVL: 4-5"

Distinguishing field characteristics:

medium; tan to brown with **red-orange mid-section**; slender, with thin tail (blue on juveniles) 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



Red Rock NCA; NV



Salt Creek; Death Valley NP

Great Basin Tiger Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tigris tigris*)

Measurements:

Average Length: 11" SVL: 4-5"

Distinguishing field characteristics:

medium; gray to brown; slender, with thin tail 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, small lizards

Mojave presence: native



Red Rock NCA; NV



Christmas Tree Pass; NV



Red Rock NCA; NV



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:

medium; 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"

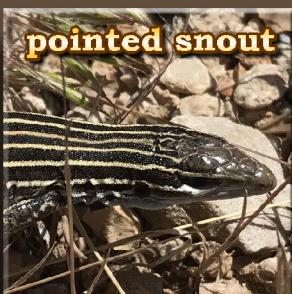
Distinguishing field characteristics:

medium; 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)

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 **parthogenesis** (asexual reproduction); formerly placed in the genus **Cnemidophorus**

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



Grand Wash Cliffs; AZ



Grand Wash Cliffs; AZ



Grand Wash Cliffs; AZ



Grand Wash Cliffs; AZ

Family **CROTAPHYTIDAE** (Collards Lizards)

Great Basin Collared Lizard (*Crotaphytus bicinctores*)

Measurements:

Average Length: 10" SVL: 4.5"

Distinguishing field characteristics:

medium; stout, body with dark bands; **two black collar rings** separated by whitish band; prominent **boney eyebrows** on broad head; long, plump, laterally flattened tail with small dark spots; large rear legs; **(m)** olive to gray, sometimes orange crossbands and dark throat (with black-and-blue dewlap in breeding season); **(f)** black to brown; incomplete collar rings; orange bars on sides in breeding season; **(juv)** paler body color than adults

Notes:

relatively common; diurnal; endemic to the rugged, rocky, arid environments (foothills, canyons, creosote scrub, etc.) of the western US from se OR/sw ID south through e CA/w AZ, and from the Sierra Nevada east to UT; 2 subspecies; aka **Desert Collard**

Lizard, Mohave Black-Collared Lizard; smooth granular scales give appearance of skin; able to run on hind legs to capture prey or escape predators; diet consists of various arthropods, small vertebrates (including other smaller reptiles), fruit and vegetation

Mojave presence: native

Comments:

Though listed as common (overall the species probably is), the collard lizard is not anywhere near as prevalent in the Mojave region. The juvenile pictured here--showing off his budding territorial display posture--is the only member of his species I have encountered and photographed--long before I acquired a passion for wildlife photography. His pose perched upon a rock is rather typical and characteristic of the species, although not unique (other species, such as the **Zebra Tailed Lizard** *Callisaurus draconoides* will also employ the same technique).

Several species bear similar collars, but the prominent brows and skin-like scales are good field identifiers.



Red Rock Cyn NCA, NV



Red Rock Cyn NCA, NV



Red Rock Cyn NCA, NV



Red Rock Cyn NCA, NV

Family SCINCIDAE (Skinks)

Gilbert's Skink (*Plestiodon gilberti*)



Measurements:

Average Length: 9" SVL: 4.5"

Distinguishing field characteristics:

medium; 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 Canyon 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 the



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 Canyon National Conservation Area](#).

Family **HELODERMATIDAE** (Beaded Lizards)

Gila Monster (*Heloderma suspectum*)



Lake Mead NRA



Photo: Chris Meyers

Red Rock NCA; Nevada

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 percent of its life underground; found in the 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 2-3 known venomous lizards, the others being the **Mexican Beaded Lizard** and possibly the **Komodo Dragon** (likely septic rather than venomous); both genders essentially identical

Mojave presence: native; rare

Comments:

Rare and reclusive is a combination that makes for sightings that are particularly special. One can go a lifetime without ever crossing paths with this unusual reptile! If such an experience does occur, caution while interacting with your guest is advised--with a caveat. You practically have to shove your hand down its throat to receive your just reward, because that's where its fangs are! Gilas are slow and lumbering (they're not going to chase you down), and unlike rattlesnakes that strike from a distance, then follow their prey till it collapses, gilas pounce and latch on with a trap-jawed grasp to grind (rather than inject) venom into the prey's flesh. Gruesome, but effective.

The first specimen I encountered in the wild was, remarkably, a juvenile deep in a mine adit in Railroad Pass south of Las Vegas. I missed him as I was going in, so he must have been aroused out of a cozy slumber by my passing and came out of his hiding spot to see what the disturbance was. We met on my way out. Judging from his profound and alarming hissing, he was obviously not as impressed with me as I was with it. Message delivered and received, I ended the standoff, considering it a draw. I didn't make a new friend that day, but it was--nevertheless--a very rewarding experience...to me, at least!

Unfortunately (in retrospect), that happened long before I developed an interest in photography, so no pics to memorialize the encounter, but such memories never fade!

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; sexually monomorphic

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