

Reptiles and Amphibians

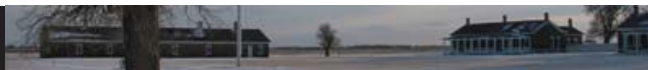
Importance

Amphibians and reptiles (herps) represent an important part of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. They eat a wide variety of invertebrate species, and, in turn, they are prey for many fish, bird, and mammal species. The American Southwest is well known for its abundance and diversity of reptiles. Although this region is less known for its amphibian populations, they too can be quite abundant in some habitats and are good indicators of environmental change due to their sensitivity to a variety of factors such as pollution, introduced species, drought, habitat destruction, and disease. Herp populations may be affected by these factors and exhibit measurable changes in site occupancy, distribution, abundance, and species richness.

Status and Trends

The Fort Larned National Historic Site (FOLS), located in central Pawnee County, Kansas, is comprised of developed areas, grassland, and the Pawnee River lined by a wooded riparian corridor. Fort Larned was established as a military outpost in 1859, primarily to protect U.S. mail and commercial freight traffic along the Santa Fe Trail. Surveys for herpetofauna were conducted in spring-fall of 1998 by Jerry Choate, Mark VanDoren, and Curtis Schmidt (Fort Hays State University), and spring-summer of 2001 by the Kansas Natural Heritage Inventory (KSNHI [Jennifer Delisle and William Busby]) (final report dated 2004). Surveys were conducted in 2001 because species documentation in 1998 had not reached the desired level. The results of these inventories provide valuable baseline information for future inventory and monitoring.

Thirty-five species are on a revised (2001) master list for FOLS (Figure 1). A total of 19 of these species have been documented at the site to date. Seventeen species were recorded in the first survey, 9 (none "new") were recorded in the second survey, and two were observed by park personnel. Documented species include: the Plains leopard frog (*Rana blairi*), Great Plains toad (*Bufo cognatus*), Woodhouse's toad (*Bufo woodhousii*), painted



RESOURCE BRIEF



Ornate box turtle (male)

COURTESY OF COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

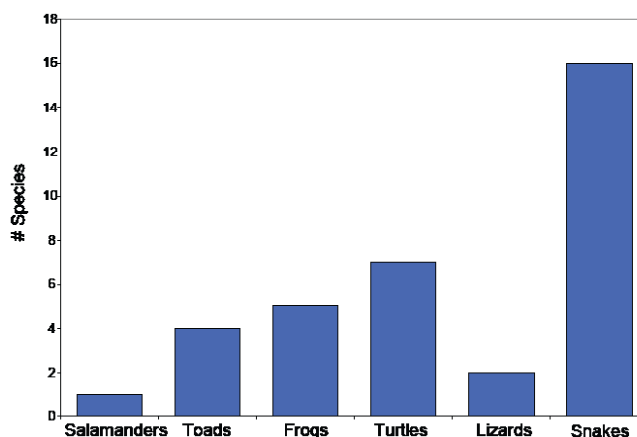


Figure 1. Number of species on master herp list at FOLS.

turtle (*Chrysemys picta*), Ornate box turtle (*Terrapene ornata*), six-lined racerunner (*Cnemidophorus sexlineatus*), Plains garter snake (*Thamnophis radix*) and bullsnake (*Pituophis catenifer*). The first four species listed were among the most abundant found in the 1998 survey. One species tracked by the KSNHI, the false map turtle (*Gratemys pseudogeographica*), has also been observed.

Discussion

Using the 2001 revised master list, the documentation of herpetological species is 54% complete. Many of the snakes that may occur at FOLS would be expected to occur in low numbers; therefore, they may be best encountered opportunistically by park personnel and visitors.

COURTESY OF CO. DIV. OF WILDL.



Plains leopard frog

