

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF EL MORRO NATIONAL MONUMENT

by Gary M. Stolz, 10/86

El Morro National Monument, on the edge of the Zuni Mountains in northwest New Mexico, was established in 1906, as our nation's second National Monument. Although relatively small (1,278 acres) it has within it's boundaries a wide variety of habitats, where numerous amphibians and reptiles can be found.

While sage and rabbitbrush dominate the flats, pinyon and juniper are scattered throughout the area. Oak thickets provide cover along 200 foot high sandstone cliffs, while stands of ponderosa pine can be found in more shaded areas. Water is available from the 200,000 gallon Inscription Pool, as well as numerous mesa top tinajas, nearby cattle tanks, and the monument's sewer lagoons.

This checklist includes 31 species (9 amphibians and 22 reptiles). Of these 31 species, 20 have actually been recorded within the monument boundaries, as of this writing (10/86). Nine of the "hypotheticals" have been found within a few miles of the monument. The other two (Mountain Treefrog and Sonora Mountain Kingsnake) are included, as El Morro contains proper habitat, fairly close to their range boundaries, and unconfirmed reports of both exist in the area. In addition to those species included within this checklist, a few other unexpected herpetofauna specimens have been recorded within the Zuni Mountains, just outside the border of their normal range and habitat (according to Gehlbach, in his report "Herpetology Of The Zuni Mountains Region, Northwestern New Mexico", Smithsonian Institute, 1965). These would be extremely unlikely at El Morro, and include the Great Basin Spadefoot Toad (*Scaphiopus intermontanus*), Great Plains Skink (*Eumeces obsoletus*), Coachwhip Snake (*Masticophis flagellum*), and the Black-tailed Rattlesnake (*Crotalus molossus*).

Nomenclature used here is based on Stebbins, A Field Guide To Western Reptiles And Amphibians, 2nd edition, revised, 1985. The author wishes to express thanks to A. Dale Belcher, Curator of Herpetology, Rio Grande Zoo, Albuquerque, New Mexico, for his assistance in reviewing this checklist and making valuable suggestions.

Amphibians and reptiles, like all wildlife populations, fluctuate with changes in habitat, climate, and food supply. To help further our knowledge of El Morro's wildlife, we encourage you to report your observations at the monument's visitor center, or send them to: Superintendent, El Morro National Monument, Ramah, New Mexico, 87321.

OBSERVER(S) _____ DATE(S) _____
TIME(S) _____ WEATHER _____
LOCATION(S) _____ COMMENTS _____

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF EL MORRO NATIONAL MONUMENT

Class Amphibia (amphibians)

Order Caudata (salamanders)

Family Ambystomatidae (mole salamanders)

Arizona Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum nebulosum*) -

Once common in monument, breeding in large numbers in Inscription Pool, extirpated with the exotic introduction of Yellow Perch (*Perca flavescens*), fish removed fall 1986 and salamanders reintroduced, burrowing species, nocturnal, found in cattle tanks throughout area, active on warm rainy nights, feeds on insects and worms.

Order Anura (frogs and toads)

Family Plerobatidae (spadefoot toads)

Southern (New Mexico) Spadefoot Toad (*Scaphiopus multiplicatus*) -

Common throughout monument, breeding in nearby cattle tanks, tinajas and Inscription Pool, formerly considered a subspecies of the Western Spadefoot (*S. hammondi*), often seen on monument road during warm rainy nights of early summer, very vocal at this time, burrowing species, remains hidden outside breeding season, very fast maturing tadpoles can metamorphose within two weeks of egg laying, as desert water holes dry up, toxic skin secretions, feeds on insects and worms, nocturnal.

Plains Spadefoot Toad (*Scaphiopus bombifrons*) -

Common throughout monument, often seen with Southern Spadefoots on roads during warm rainy nights of early summer, breeds in cattle tanks, tinajas and Inscription Pool, prominent boss between eyes separates this species from the former, very vocal during breeding season, burrowing species, remains hidden rest of year, very fast maturing tadpoles can metamorphose within two weeks of egg laying, as desert water holes dry up, toxic skin secretions, feeds on insects and worms, nocturnal.

Family Bufonidae (true toads)

Woodhouse's Toad (*Bufo woodhousei*) -

Common throughout monument, active on rainy nights throughout warm season, where seen most often along roads and on watered lawns of buildings, breeds in Inscription Pool and nearby cattle tanks, needs longer lasting water than spadefoots for tadpoles to mature, burrows during dry and cold seasons, feeds on insects and worms, diurnal or nocturnal.

Red-spotted Toad (*Bufo punctatus*) -

Uncommon in monument, prefers altitudes under 6,000 feet, widespread in southwest, first recorded at El Morro 7/8/86 on road during rainy night, only North American toad to lay single eggs rather than strings, burrows during dry and cold seasons, feeds on insects and worms, nocturnal.

Family Hylidae (treefrogs and allies)

Spined Chorus Frog (*Pseudacris triseriata*) -

Hypothetical, within range, found in area, not yet recorded in monument, unlikely due to isolated water supply, feeds on insects and spiders, diurnal or nocturnal.

Canyon Treefrog (*Hyla arenicolor*) -

Hypothetical, within range and habitat, not yet recorded in monument, fairly common in vicinity, very likely occurs at El Morro undetected, breeds in streams and tinajas in area, if present mesa top pools would be where to look, feeds on insects and spiders, primarily nocturnal.

Mountain Treefrog (*Hyla eximia*) -

Hypothetical, just north of range, not yet recorded in monument, good habitat, found in high altitude pines and pools, unlikely at El Morro, feeds on insects and spiders, primarily nocturnal.

Family Ranidae (true frogs)

Northern Leopard Frog (*Rana pipiens*) -

Hypothetical, within range, not yet recorded in monument, common in nearby lakes and cattle tanks, unlikely at El Morro due to isolated water supply, feeds on insects and spiders, diurnal or nocturnal.

Class Reptilia (reptiles)

Order Squamata (lizards and snakes)

Suborder Lacertillia (lizards)

Family Iguanidae (iguanids)

Lesser Earless Lizard (*Holbrookia maculata*) -

Uncommon in monument, found in sandy areas with brush cover, most often in box canyon and near mesa, no external ear opening, skin color matches rocks and soil of occupied habitat, feeds on insects and spiders, diurnal.

Large-spotted Leopard Lizard (*Gambelia wislizenii wislizenii*) -

Hypothetical, within range and habitat, not yet recorded in monument, uncommon in vicinity, very likely occurs undetected at El Morro, feeds on insects, spiders, and small lizards, diurnal.

Western Collard Lizard (*Crotophytus collaris baileyi*) -

Hypothetical, within range and habitat, not yet recorded in monument, found throughout vicinity, very likely occurs undetected at El Morro, feeds on insects, spiders, and small lizards, diurnal.

Plateau (Eastern Fence) Lizard (*Sceloporus undulatus elongatus* X *tristichus*) -

Abundant in monument, most likely lizard to be seen at El Morro, often bobs head in territory display, males of this species and other spiny lizards have bright blue bellies, feeds on insects and spiders, diurnal.

Northern Sagebrush Lizard (*Sceloporus graciosus graciosus*) -

Uncommon throughout monument, most often seen near shelter of pinyon/juniper and ponderosas, found near mesa and in box canyon, ground dwelling species, retreating rocks or brush when threatened, insectivorous, diurnal.

Tree Lizard (*Urosaurus ornatus*) -

Uncommon in monument, found most often in rock walls of mesa and box canyon, feeds on insects and spiders, diurnal.

Side-blotched Lizard (*Uta stansburiana*) -

Uncommon in monument, found in sandy open areas most often, also on rocks of mesa and box canyon, insectivorous and diurnal.

Short-horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma douglasii*) -

Fairly common in monument, found in pinyon/juniper and open areas, feeds on ants, often burrows just under soil surface, diurnal.

Family Teiidae (whiptails)

Plateau Striped Whiptail (*Chemidophorus velox*) -

Very common in monument, often seen along trails and in campground, prefers pinyon/juniper and open areas, young have blue tails, very wary and quick to run, insectivorous and diurnal, formerly known as Plateau Whiptail.

Family Scincidae (skinks)

Variable Skink (*Eumeces multivirgatus gaigae*) -

Fairly common in monument, secretive and hard to see, burrows in leaf litter and under logs near mesa and in box canyon, young have blue tails, feed on insects and spiders, diurnal.

Suborder Ophidia (snakes)

Family Colubridae (typical snakes)

Regal Ringneck Snake (*Diadophis punctatus regalis*) -

Uncommon in monument, first recorded 8/20/85 in housing area, secretive burrowing species, prefers rocks, leaf litter or logs under which to hide, feeds on insects, worms, lizards, primarily diurnal.

Desert Striped Whipsnake (*Masticophis taeniatus taeniatus*) -

Fairly common in monument, prefers open areas or scattered trees, good climber, moves quickly, feeds on lizards and small mammals, often enters rodent burrows, diurnal.

Plateau Patchnose Snake (*Salvadora grahamiae grahamiae*) -

Hypothetical, within range and habitat, not yet found in monument, unlikely due to habitat, prefers open woodland and mountain forest, feeds on lizards and small mammals, burrows under leaf litter, rocks or logs, diurnal.

Sonora Gopher Snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus affinis*) -

Very common throughout monument and vicinity, most likely snake to be seen at El Morro, good climber and burrower, feeds on many mice and rats, very beneficial species, can hiss and vibrate tail as rattler mimic, primarily diurnal, closely related subspecies, the Great Basin Gopher Snake (*P. m. deserticola*) has been recorded as close as Zuni and is hypothetical at El Morro, as are possible intergrades, both are constrictors.

Painted Desert Glossy Snake (*Arizona elegans philipi*) -

Hypothetical, within range and habitat, not yet found in monument, fairly common in vicinity, very likely occurs undetected at El Morro, constrictor, feeds on rodents, lizards, and other snakes, secretive burrowing species, variety of habitats, primarily nocturnal.

New Mexico Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum celasnops*) -

Rare in monument, first recorded 10/29/84 near Inscription Pool, secret burrows under logs, rocks or bark, constrictor, feeds on mice, rats and other snakes, nocturnal except in cooler weather when it becomes diurnal.

Sonora Mountain Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis pyromelana pyromelana*) -

Hypothetical, near edge of range, not yet recorded in monument, good habitat, uncommon species, unlikely at El Morro, found in pinyon/juniper up to spruce/fir habitat, secretive, burrows under rocks, logs or bark, constrictor, feeds on mice, rats and other snakes, primarily nocturnal.

Black-necked Garter Snake (*Thamnophis cyrtopsis cyrtopsis*) -

Uncommon in monument, first recorded 10/2/86 near sewer lagoons, fairly common in vicinity, wide range of habitats including deserts, grasslands, and pinyon/juniper, often near water, feeds on insects, worms, frogs, toads, and tadpoles, live young, diurnal, secretes pungent musk if disturbed

Wandering Garter Snake (*Thamnophis elegans vagrans*) -

Fairly common in monument, common in vicinity, wide range of habitats, including all of El Morro, often near water where it feeds on salamanders, frogs, toads, tadpoles, lizards, fish, worms, etc., bears live young, diurnal, secretes pungent musk if disturbed.

Night Snake (*Hypsiglena torquata*) -

Hypothetical, within range and habitat, uncommon in vicinity, not yet recorded in monument, very likely occurs undetected, sandy or rocky desert habitat, secretive, burrows under rocks, logs or bark, very mild venom injected through "rear fangs" (enlarged grooved teeth in back of upper jaw), feeds on lizards and frogs, nocturnal.

Family Viperidae (vipers), Subfamily Crotalinae (pit vipers)

Prairie Rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis viridis*) -

Uncommon in monument, fairly common in vicinity, found most often in pinyon/juniper and rocky areas near mesa, venomous, pit viper, feeds on rodents, bears live young, primarily nocturnal.

Western Diamondback Rattlesnake (*Crotalus atrox*) -

Hypothetical, on edge of range, recorded 9/15/86 in close vicinity, not yet found within monument, unlikely, prefers lower altitudes, open desert, arroyos, rocky areas, venomous, pit viper, feeds on rodents, bears live young, primarily nocturnal.