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Flat-tailed Horned Lizard

What is the flat-tail horned lizard?

The flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*) is a small desert reptile that inhabits the open, sparsely vegetated valleys and flat lands of the southwestern Sonoran desert in California; southwestern Arizona; and northeastern Baja California Norte, Mexico. It is one of 13 recognized members of the genus *Phrynosoma* (horned lizards).

The flat-tailed horned lizard has a wide, flattened body, with a short tail and dagger-like spines on its head. It can be distinguished from other horned lizards by a dark stripe running down the back and the presence of two slender, elongated horns. Flat-tailed horned lizards are pale colored to closely match the soils on which they live.

Flat-tailed horned lizards may be preyed upon by round-tailed ground squirrels, ravens, loggerhead shrikes, and snakes. To make them less visible to predators, horned lizards can eliminate their shadows by flattening their bodies against the ground.

Little is known about the reproductive cycle of the flat-tailed horned lizard. However, compared to other horned lizards, they produce relatively small egg clutches.

These desert reptiles are insectivores, with the majority of their diet consisting of 150-200 harvester ants per day. Usually the lizard searches for prey in open areas, sometimes quietly waiting for unsuspecting ants to crawl over its body before quickly snapping them up with a flick of the tongue.

Why is the flat-tailed horned lizard being proposed for listing as threatened?

Habitat within the historic range of the flat-tailed horned lizard has been lost, fragmented, or otherwise disturbed by development activities, off-highway vehicle use, military activities, introduction of non-native plants, and pesticide use. As of 1997, approximately 1,244,000 acres of habitat for the horned lizard remains within the United States, but

much of this remaining habitat is degraded or fragmented.

On November 29, 1993, the Service published in the Federal Register, a proposal to list the flat-tailed horned lizard as threatened, under the Federal Endangered Species Act, as amended. We withdrew our proposal on July 15, 1997.

In January 1998, Defenders of Wildlife filed a lawsuit against the Service challenging our decision to withdraw the proposed listing rule. The Ninth Circuit Court upheld the Service's decision to withdraw the proposed rule. The ruling was appealed and on July 31, 2001, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, vacated the District Court's 1999 ruling. On October 24, 2001, the District Court ordered the Service to reinstate the 1993 proposed rule to list the flat-tailed horned lizard as threatened.

The term threatened, as defined by the Act, means a species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

What is being done to save the flat-tail horned lizard?

In 1997, several Federal, State, and local agencies approved the *Flat-Tailed Horned Lizard Rangewide Management Strategy* (Management Strategy).

The Rangewide Management Strategy is designed to minimize surface disturbances on public lands and to maintain habitat to support healthy lizard populations. Approximately 35 percent of habitat remaining in the United States is found within areas covered by the Rangewide Management Strategy.

Currently, the Service is working with Federal, state, and local jurisdictions to develop the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan

(CVMSHCP) to guide protection of desert ecosystems in the Coachella Valley, California.