

Our purpose is to document and publicize the values and conservation needs of horned lizards, to promote horned lizard conservation projects, and to assist with horned lizard management initiatives throughout their ranges.

Volume 14, Issue No. 3

AUGUST 2009

## West Texas Horned Lizard Survey May 21 - 25, 2009

*by Bill Brooks with assistance from Tanya Phillips and Carolyn Todd*

I thought it was really wonderful that Tanya Phillips and Charles Reburn invited the HLCS to survey their Chihuahuan Desert property out in West Texas. I love the area and wasn't about to miss it.

I took off Thursday morning, May 21, at the crack of 10:15am (early for me). The drive out was pretty straight forward: out 290 west from Austin to I-10, follow that just past Fort Stockton, SW on 67 to Alpine and South on 118. Ten hours later, Terlingua Ranch, north of Big Bend National Park, was easy to find.

Tanya gave us good directions twisting through the dirt roads heading toward her place. I saw huge jackrabbits lope across the road ahead of me. It was evening but still light when I shot past her driveway and had a flat tire. No problem. Plenty of



*Several Roundtail Horned Lizards were sighted on this survey. Photo by Tanya Phillips.*

time to pull my spare out from under the van and replace the tire, except... my spare was flat, too. (I had my shop tune up the van and ask them specifically to check my spare before I left. They didn't.) Chuck and Tanya knew I was a bit overdue, so they drove out and found me hiking down the road. It's nice to have friends.

Tanya and Chuck's vacation home is wonderful. Their long driveway curves up to their two cabins attached together with a deck. From the deck, there is a wonderful view of the desert floor, surrounding hills, and the Christmas Mountains in the distance. You can even see the Sierra Del

### Upcoming Events

**Fort Hood Trip**  
Killeen, Texas  
August 22, 2009

**Old Rip Festival**  
Eastland, Texas  
October 3, 2009

*Continued on page 3*

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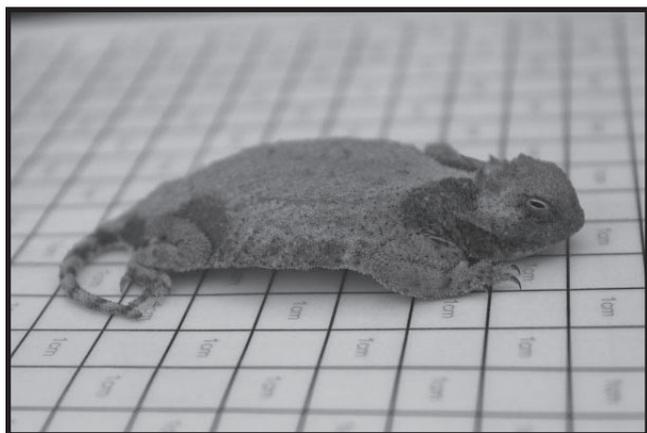
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Roundtail surveying his West Texas domain. Photo by Robyn Herry.

Carmen Mountains in Mexico. It's lovely. In one cabin, there is a sitting room, a bathroom with a composting toilet, a nice big shower, and a full kitchen with a small propane refrigerator, oven, and a dining area. The other cabin consists of two rooms. The largest room sleeps 5, there is another toilet, and the smaller room is Chuck and Tanya's bedroom. They also have a lovely outside shower which Chuck finished plumbing just for us!

The house is "off the grid" except for a fiber optic land phone line. Their electricity comes from two solar panels, which won't power anything which heats, but we had all



Roundtail taking a nap while being measured. Photo by Tanya Phillips.

the lights we wanted. There was even a small microwave. The water is all rainwater caught from the roof and stored and purified in two 1550-gallon water tanks. Luckily it rained a couple of inches when we were there so we had plenty of water.

When I got there, Tanya & Chuck were there with Tanya's friend from San Marcos, Robyn Herry. Laurie Piepenbrink and her daughter Amy were also there from New Braunfels. (Amy was visiting from college in San Francisco.) Carolyn and Jim Todd were staying at the Longhorn Motel (adequate only for a spouse who prefers not to camp.)

Friday morning, it was cool but we were out looking for reptiles anyway. There was a surprising amount of flowering plants. The most striking were the bright purple flowering barrel cacti. There was yellow blooming prickly pear and plenty of yucca, ocotillo, and agave. We saw the Texas Spotted Whiptail and the smaller but more colorful Trans-Pecos Striped Whiptail.

Rollo Newsom arrived from Austin in the early afternoon.

Later, Chuck drove me 45 minutes on rock roads to Study Butte where I bought two \$30 used tires. I was mobile again and Chuck turned a major problem into a minor hick-up.

While I was gone, Tanya found a Diamond-backed Rattlesnake. Later in the day Amy was the FTF (first to find) a Round-tail Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma modestum*). Not long afterward, she found another, smaller one. We held on to them until David Wojnowski from UNT, Denton and Danny



Female roundtail being weighed. Photo by Tanya Phillips.

Martin and Laura Rosen from Fort Collins, Colorado drove down in their rented car from the Odessa airport. It didn't take long for Dave to get into the act. He caught two Texas Banded Geckos.

There was a big photo fest until dinner when we had two types of chili. Carolyn brought her excellent chili and Chuck made some venison chili. Both were wonderful. Now I was really in heaven.

After dark, Chick took Danny, and Laura road hunting. They

Continued on page 4

found Red Spotted Toads, Couch's Spadefoot Toads, kangaroo rats and tarantulas.

Later that night, the sky opened up. It rained about an inch and the light show was fantastic! Tanya even saw dust thrown up by a close lightning bolt. Right in the middle of the storm, we got a text message from J. Jill Heatley, a vet from A&M. She was heading up the hills toward the cabin. Tanya and Chuck went out to meet her.

Saturday morning was cool and delightful. Wildflowers were blooming and the resurrection ferns (Some call it an air plant, *Selaginella pilifera*) opened up and were bright green. We watched mule deer walk past the feeder and a little wren fly grass into his birdhouse on the porch.

That afternoon, Petei Guth from Alpine joined us and we found two more Round-tailed Horned Lizards. Unfortunately, Petei left before her friend, Susan Curry of Alpine arrived.



Roundtail lizard from the top. Notice how it blends in with its environment.

Susan was working for the Texas census bureau. She just had a little time to come by and chat, but we were all glad she did. (I found it interesting that 4 people who attended this survey also attended the very first meeting of the HLCS back on Nov. 6, 1990: Carolyn Todd, Rollo Newsom, Susan Curry, & Bill Brooks.) That evening it rained again, but not as much

as it rained Friday. Sunday the eight of us who were left, piled into the pickup and headed toward Big Bend National Park. The first stop was Lake Ament. It wasn't



Roundtail laying on Tanya's shirt so it is easier to see. Photo by Robyn Herry.

much of a lake due to a cracked dam, but it was an interesting area and David caught a Western Black-necked Garter Snake, which we photographed, then released, as we did with all the reptiles we caught. This was a non-collecting trip, as usual. We photographed everything, but took nothing home.

The next stop was Indian Head, part of Big Bend National Park but not attached to the park. It is near Study Butte. We hiked in and saw pictographs, petroglyphs, grinding stones, and shelter caves. We even found a Rio Grande Leopard frog at a small spring. Southwestern Earless Lizards and Whiptails were everywhere. Tanya spotted another Round-tailed Horned Lizard (our 5th and last).

We then drove into the Basin for lunch. This is the prettiest part of Big Bend as far as I'm concerned. On the drive



Movie stars on the red carpet don't attract this much attention. From left to right: David Wojnowski, Bill Brooks, Danny Martin (on ground), Carolyn Todd (standing), Laura Rosen, Rollo Newsom. Photo by Tanya Phillips.



from left to right: Laura Rosen, Jill Heatley, Danny Martin, Charles Reburn, Tanya Phillips, Robyn Herry, Bill Brooks, David Wojnowski, (not shown Laurie Piepenbrink, Amy Piepenbrink, Carolyn Todd, Jim Todd, Rollo Newsom, Susan Curry, Petie Guth) Photo by Tanya Phillips.



Roundtail lizard posing for the camera. Photo by Bill Brooks.

home we stopped for ice and then toured Tanya's relatives' properties. Their homes, which were in various stages of completion, were really interesting. Along the way Dave caught another Black-necked Garter Snake and a pink phase Western Coachwhip.

We got home in time for another wonderful dinner, a round of target practice and, after dark,

Chuck pulled out the fireworks. What a nice end to our visit.

Monday we said our goodbyes. Most of us took off except for Tanya, Chuck, and Robyn who were staying an extra day (to clean up after all of us, no doubt.) Most headed toward their own homes, but I headed SW toward Big Bend Ranch State Park. I had a grand time the next few days, but that is another story for another day.

Many thanks go out to Tanya and Chuck for hosting a wonderful survey.



Roundtailed lizard. Photo by Bill Brooks.



Which is the real horned lizard and which is the tattoo on Robyn's back? Photo by Tanya Phillips.



Comparing colors between a light grey roundtail on the left to a mottled tan one on the right. Photo by Tanya Phillips.



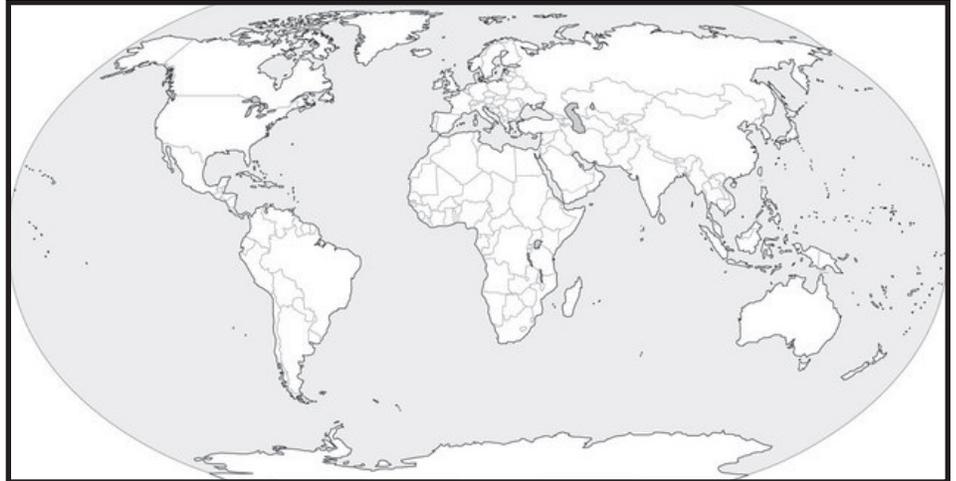
# Horned Lizards Migrate to Pastures New (1)

By Jane Manaster

In the summer of 1918, as war waged in Europe, a certain Mr. Bloxum brought a box of horned toads across the state line from Texas to Louisiana, and released them on a sandy hill near his home in DeSoto Parish<sup>(2)</sup>. Eight years later he claimed they were reproducing there, beyond their native range. Was his intention to ensure the survival of the species? Did he somehow link the overseas human carnage to the need for protecting a more manageable population? Are the descendents of those horny toads still alive and migrating back and forth into East Texas, unaware of political borders?

Migration is a word more often associated with humans than animals, but animals migrate too. Unaware, they are simply transported from one place to another, and while people can make a conscious resolve to learn new ways animals must simply adapt in order to survive.

As conservationist, we want to ensure the continuance of the birds in the air and the beasts of the field, to hold on to the natural world in all its dimensions. Sadly, horned lizards are seen infrequently in their natural habitat: they have become an iconic symbol of wildlife in the American Southwest.



Fourteen species of horned toads, so named because of their round bodies though they are actually lizards, range from the Pacific coast to East Texas and from British Columbia to Guatemala. Texas has three resident species, among these the *Phrynosoma cornutum*, the Texas horned toad, inhabits the easternmost range. This is the Texas horned toad. Its speckled back has a well-defined cen-

tral stripe serving to camouflage and thus protect on rocky land.

lizards were dolls or babies, treating them with TLC. The harmless lizard, which the French might describe as *joli-laid*, or pretty and ugly both, fascinates a variety of predators. They select the most appropriate of their three defense tactics to stand their ground.

They may choose to stand still and inflate their bodies to make themselves appear large and ferocious or, if circumstances seem better

suited to fleeing, they will turn tail and scurry away.

The third defense technique is unique, shared by our Texas horned lizard and just two other species. First described in English by Carnegie Institute research paleontologist O.H. Hay in 1893, his report on 'The Ejection of Blood from the Eyes of Horned Toads' was startling, to say the least<sup>(6)</sup>. He described a reddish substance

## Migration: moving a place to live to another place for a while

Texans who grew up alongside horned lizards, popularly known as 'horned toads,' remember them as school playground pets, stroking their bellies to hypnotize them, or picking them up by their stubby tails to chase girls in a prematurely flirtatious manner causing them to feign alarm. The girls tended to pretend the

described a reddish substance

apparently squirted from the lizard's eye, tasted the droplets on his hand, and discovered they were indeed blood.

Predators don't come singly. The lizard population is challenged by black-top highways luring them to their death, fire ants devouring their staple harvester ants, and developers snatching away territory. Scientists setting up breeding stations attempt to reverse the trend. Perhaps migration is also a viable path to salvation.

I keep hearing "Where are they now?" so I continue to investigate. Are they still lurking under the same rocks, in the brush, or on the lower reaches of mountains? When people talked about 'fewer than there were', what sort of numbers were involved?

As a historical geographer, it has seemed practical to turn to the past to seek an answer. A 1958 University of Texas thesis written by Gordon Creel to achieve a Master's degree in zoology discussed all the physical attributes others had researched. But then, examining almost 400 species for laboratory study, his mind was free to explore new possibilities. Perhaps as he dissected and made copious notes, he wondered how many were shipped out of state and, more intriguingly *why*.

His investigations paid off a step at a time. One dealer confessed that in nine months he had shipped 50,000 less than in the previous year - not 50,000

but 50,000 less <sup>(3)</sup>. Children earned a nickel apiece for bringing them to him, and were told to bring only the adults so the young could grow up and reproduce to maintain the supply. He told Creel, "There just ain't as many this year as there was last year." Numbers have fallen sharply since then.

A single curio dealer in the early years of the twentieth century had almost depleted the horned toad population in the Los Angeles Basin <sup>(4)</sup>. Supplying customers with countless thousands of horny toads to adorn ashtrays or paperweights. Subsequently, the southwestern states drew up legislation to ban such endeavors, a gesture made long after the stable door was left open.

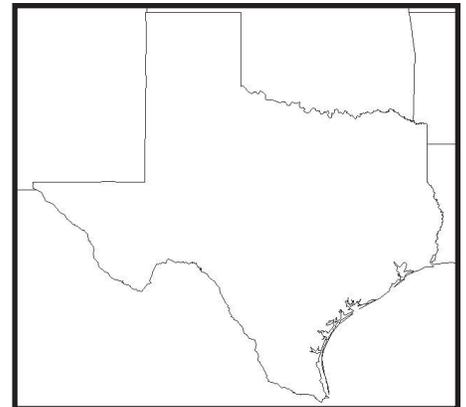
Such dealers were not necessarily bad guys. And the children's nickels were perhaps converted into a college education. Fortunately, the ban on collection did not extend to a ban on emigration and the Texas lizard, as well as kindred species, unwittingly made their way to survival in pastures new. In places around the country and around the world, there are colonies where once there were none.

Sometimes the migration was ordered purposefully. In the late nineteenth century, a professor at the University of Bogota in Colombia saw them as a means of saving crops from insects pests. A group was assigned to Hawaii on a similar mission. Guatemalans looked on them as a means to save

the coffee crop. The eventual fate of these exotic little pioneers is unknown <sup>(5)</sup>.

Closer to home, citrus growers in Florida imported them to keep down predatory insect populations and for years they were spotted in sandy lots around Miami. No doubt, the sandy lots have long since gone. They were spotted in Leesburg, northwest of Orlando and several inland and coastal counties including a thriving community on Fort George Island <sup>(6)</sup>.

Many of us know about the Abilene, Texas, Boy Scouts whose horny toads, crowded into shoeboxes, were intended as trade items at the annual jamboree in Pennsylvania. Some were indeed traded and some escaped. The survivors, contingent on the climate and morphology of the spot where they were set free, quite likely started a family tree.



Young servicemen stationed near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, during World War II, were lonesome for Texas. Their wives or sweethearts, and maybe their mothers, packed up some *P. cornutum* and

# Member Spotlight: Tanya Phillips

By Tanya Phillips



Hi, I am Tanya Phillips and am the HLCS Secretary. I have lived in Austin, Texas since 1985. I am originally from NE Iowa. I have a BA in Education from the University of Northern Iowa.

I am married and have two daughters ages 18 and 21, and

four step-children ages 18, 20, 21, 25. So all of our kids are grown and three are in college, whew!

I have four dogs (two Labs and two Chihuahuas) and a Quaker Parrott named KoKo (who talks). My hubby has a huge fish pond with Koi and goldfish. We live in the country off 290 West on a couple acres of land and we love living out of the city and having room to stretch out!

My husband is Chuck Reburn. He works for the state as a Business Analyst. I work as a Lactation Consultant, a Local Coordinator for Exchange Students and a Course Designer for outdoor GPS-based treasure hunts called Geoteam-

ing (three part-time jobs).

All my life I have loved all kinds of animals and other creatures such as lizards, frogs, and snakes. We have 40 acres of land near the Christmas Mountains in Big Bend and I have seen horny toads there.

I have attached a few pics of myself and my family so you can get to know me!



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# A “Salute” to Horned Lizards – HLCS Members Invited to Participate in Fort Hood Survey Opportunity

By Lee Ann Linam

HLCS members have been invited to visit Fort Hood Military Reservation near Killeen, Texas, as part of an effort to initiate horned lizard research and monitoring on the site. Fort Hood is a large (over 200,000-acre) training site with a long history of wildlife management and research on several sensitive wildlife species, including endangered songbirds, karst invertebrates, bats, and salamanders.



Habitats on the facility are diverse as well, including grasslands, shrublands, forests, and riparian zones. Site personnel are interested in setting up transects to monitor Texas horned lizards and harvester

ants and have invited HLCS to help them conduct some initial surveys.

HLCS will make an initial visit on Saturday, August 22. Some opportunities may be available to stay overnight and camp. If you are interested in participating in this survey and would like to be updated concerning the trip details, please contact Lee Ann Linam at [lainam@txwinet.com](mailto:lainam@txwinet.com) or 512-656-1222.



## Upcoming Events

**HLCS Field Trip to Fort Hood** to survey for horned lizards (Killeen, TX) on August 22, 2009. If you would like to know more or to sign up, contact Lee Ann Linam at 512-847-9480 or [leeann.linam@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:leeann.linam@tpwd.state.tx.us) for more information.

**Old Rip Festival** - October 3, 2009 in Eastland, Texas. Contact the Eastland Chamber of Commerce at (254) 629-2332 or Toll Free at (877) 2 OLD-RIP or email at [ecofc@eastland.net](mailto:ecofc@eastland.net).



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shipped them to the east coast. An untold number was released once the men overcame their homesickness and a colony evolved there and elsewhere around Charleston <sup>(7)</sup>.

Over the years they have been exported for study or pet stores in several European countries, nowhere more successfully than in Switzerland where the naturalist and photographer Bertrand Baur has raised and written about them for many years, protecting them carefully from the colder mountain air and feeding them a diet of crickets, and very small ants <sup>(8)</sup>.

Some stories don't have such happy endings. A certain Monsieur Gary transported horned toads in a box of earth from Texas to his home in Nice, in the south of France. His curiosity got the better of him and during the winter, when he checked

to see how they were adjusting, he awoke them from their hibernation and they died <sup>(9)</sup>.

The second consignment to France fared much better. One hundred and fifty little migrants became party favors for a Texas Night party at the Municipal Casino in Nice. *O la la!* No doubt many were soon discarded with a little shriek of mock-horror. Others were recaptured after laying low for several months. They were in splendid health, and had wandered off to take up comfortable quarters in Villeneuve-Loubet, Cagnes, Antibes, and Eze <sup>(10)</sup>.

Colonies of *Phrynosoma* are still found in foreign climes, perceived as tiny monsters or revived from extinction. For sure the ingenuous migration of horned toads has contributed in small part to the survival of the species.

## NOTES

1. The name 'horned toad' is chosen for library cataloguing, but 'horned lizard' is found commonly in the title and content of publications.
2. Gordon C. Creel, *A Contribution to the Natural History and Intra-Specific Variation of the Texas Horned Lizard, Phrynosoma cornutum*, unpublished Master of Arts thesis (Austin, 1958) p.16
3. Creel, *op.cit.* p. 35
4. Mark Jennings, 'Impact of the Curio Trade for San Diego Horned Lizards,' *Journal of Herpetology* (21: 1987)
5. Jane Manaster, *Horned Lizards: The Book of Horny Toads*, revised edition (Lubbock, 2002). pp. 64-65
6. Creel, *op. cit.* p.17
7. Manaster, *op. cit.* pp. 65-66
8. Bertrand Baur and Richard R. Montanucci, *Krotenechsen*, (Offenbach, 1998)
9. Creel, *op. cit.* p.17
- 10 *ibid.* p.18



## Amateur Photography



Adult Regal Horned Lizard on Mexican Palo Verde Needles. Photo by Frank Weltmer in Superior, Arizona on May 22, 2009.



Youth Regal Horned Lizard. Photo by Rita Wentzel in Superior, Arizona in April, 2009.

# More Than One Kind of Horned Frog

Appreciation is given to *The TCU Magazine* (Texas Christian University) for allowing a reprint of this image from their Summer 2009 issue. Credits for this image go to Gary Logan for the photography and Tracy Bristol with *The TCU Magazine* for the design.



TEXAS HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma cornutum*



COAST HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma coronatum*



PYGMY HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma douglasii*



SHORT-HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma hernandesi*



FLAT-TAIL HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma mcallii*



ROUNDTAIL HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma modestum*



DESERT HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma platyrhinos*



REGAL HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma solare*



GIANT HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma asio*

**There's more than one kind of Horned Frog.** The fourth floor of Winton-Scott Hall is home to hundreds of beautiful specimens and replicas, including this collection of 13 known species of Horned Lizards. Artist Tom McCain created these detailed scale models in hand-painted pewter. Visit his Web site at [www.hornedlizardcreations.com](http://www.hornedlizardcreations.com). Learn more: The Horned Lizard Conservation Society at [www.hornedlizards.org](http://www.hornedlizards.org).



SHORT-TAIL HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma braconieri*



ROCK HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma ditmarsii*



MEXICAN-PLATEAU HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma orbiculare*



BULL HORNED LIZARD  
*Phrynosoma taurus*





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### Table of Contents

West Texas Horned Lizard Survey, May 21 - 25, 2009 . . . . .	pages 1, 3 - 5
Bill Brooks assisted by Tanya Phillips and Carolyn Todd	
Horned Lizards Migrate to Pastures New . . . . .	pages 6, 7, 10
Jane Manaster	
Member Spotlight:Tanya Phillips . . . . .	page 8
Tanya Phillips	
A "Salute" to Horned Lizards--HLCS Members Invited to Participate in Fort Hood Survey Opportunity . . . . .	page 9
Lee Ann Linam	
Upcoming Events . . . . .	page 9
Amateur Photography. . . . .	page 10
Frank Weltmer and Rita Wentze	
More Than One Kind of Horned Frog . . . . .	page 11
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