
US Fish and Wildlife Service Denies Protection of Flat-Tailed Horned Lizard

by Daniel R. Patterson, Desert Ecologist
Center for Biological Diversity

WASHINGTON DC – On January 3, the Bush administration denied endangered species act protection for the imperiled flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*), an attractive Sonoran desert native that looks like a mini-dinosaur.

The flat-tailed horned lizard inhabits portions of the Coachella, Imperial and Borrego Valleys in California as well as portions of southwestern Arizona near Yuma, northeastern Baja California and northwest Sonora, Mexico.

A typical flat-tailed horned lizard measures approximately 3.3 inches from snout to vent, and has two rows of fringed scales on either side of the body with a dark stripe along its backbone. Flat-tailed horned lizards feed primarily on native harvester ants, consuming 150-200 ants per day.

The main cause for the decline of the flat-tailed horned lizard is conversion of habitat to urban and agricultural uses. The various uses include crops, cities, off-road vehicle use, geothermal leases, military maneuvers, gravel pits, highways, etc. Other factors responsible for the decline of this species include the use of pesticides on crops. Pesticide

drift is thought to affect ant populations in adjacent habitat.

A recent draft BLM report showed a direct correlation between lizard numbers and vehicle tracks. In areas with more than 9% vehicle track coverage, significantly fewer lizards were found.

BLM-El Centro Field Office biologist Gavin Wright, who authored the report, said he personally observed flat-tailed horned lizards killed by off-road vehicles. This species is particularly

at risk of vehicle kills due to their camouflage and “freeze” behavior when threatened.

A proposed rule to list the species as threatened was published in the Federal Register on November 29, 1993. On July 15, 1997, the US Fish and Wildlife Service withdrew its proposal to list the flat-tailed horned lizard as threatened.

The decision to withdraw the proposed listing was challenged in court by conservationists. On

continued on page 3

Upcoming Events

Earth Day at the Woodlands

Woodlands, Texas

April 5, 2003

contact Cheryl Franks (Cheryl.Franks@amermsx.med.ge.com)

Upcoming Events continued on page 6

Corrections

Bumper Sticker Contest Extended

deadline extended to May 31, 2003

see page 6 for details

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continued from page 1

October 24, 2001, the District Court ordered the Service to reinstate the 1993 proposed rule to list the lizard as threatened and to make a new final listing determination for the species. On January 3, 2003 the Service withdrew that rule, denying legal protection for the lizard.

Despite downward trends in both flat-tailed horned lizards and their habitat, and the rule withdrawing the lizard from listing consideration detailed the extensive threats to the species, FWS still denied protection - basing conservation and recovery on a toothless unimplemented and unenforced voluntary conservation agreement.

A pending BLM decision to open 50,000 acres of the Algodones Sand Dunes to intensive off-road vehicle use is an example of the type of management Interior is pursuing for the species.

The government said that although lizards in the Coachella Valley are "... threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation," it officially would not consider them threatened.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's unjustified denial of desert wildlife protection continues the Bush administration's anti-environmental policies and ensures more litigation. This political decision is a favor to industry that

flies in the face of biological facts and the compelling national interest for wildlife conservation.

The Center for Biological Diversity has notified Interior Secretary Norton they intend to challenge the listing denial in federal court to win protection for the flat-tailed horned lizard and its Sonoran desert habitat.

FWS officials "have made an illegal decision that is as illegal as it was before," said Brendan Cummings, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity in Idyllwild CA.

HAYWIRE

by M. Hawley



"IS THIS WHAT THEY MEAN BY 'URBAN BLIGHT'?"

Southern California Update

by Lester G. Milroy III
President Southern California Chapter

Greetings from California. It looks like spring is here and that means the horned lizards will soon be waking from their “long winter’s nap.” The horned lizards have had a rough several seasons with the drought, but maybe that is going to change with this season’s rain fall. There will still be a “lag” in population recovery, but it is looking very promising. We still need rain in March and April to assure next years healthy populations and resources to support it.

Two new study sites are being set up in March to monitor and study San Diego Coast Horned Lizard populations. Data will be gathered to estimate population size, demographics and homerange. This information will aid the site managers to develop monitoring and conservation guidelines for horned lizard populations. This new data will also be compared to other study sites and aid in range-wide monitoring and conservation projects. (FYI - The San Diego Coast Horned Lizard is identified by the California Department of Fish and Game as a Species of Special Concern, Category 2 by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and is the only species of horned lizard protected under CITES, an international treaty, banning exportation.)

The two new sites are Caspers Wilderness Park and General Thomas F. Riley Wilderness Park in Orange County. The latest sighting information indicates that there are horned lizards on the sites but no other data is available. This will be an “enjoyable” outing from March to October. The reason I say “enjoyable” in quotes is that there is work to be done, but what a place to do

work. I am looking for volunteers to help with these projects and this will allow folks in Southern California to become more active with horned lizard conservation issues, as well as seeing the problems that face not only the horned lizards, but other species too. If anyone is interested, please contact me by email at Les4toads@aol.com, or by phone at 760-946-1094 or 760-242-3370. I can fill you in on more details and a schedule of field days. The permits are all finalized and work starts very soon.

There is another issue that needs to be addressed here in Southern California. That issue concerns the Flattail Horned Lizard, *Phrynosoma mcalli*. If you have been following this in our newsletter, you are probably aware of the problems with listing this horned lizard as Threatened. The “best available science” continues to show that the Flattail Horned Lizard has the smallest range of all the horned lizard species in the United States, continues to lose habitat, and populations continue to decline. There are few areas where human activity has not had an alarming impact on populations. Habitat fragmentation has become a major problem. Some folks have suggested collecting the horned lizards for captive propagation and reintroduction into “safe” areas. This might be an aid, but for how long? The issue of captive propagation is also in question because who would do the propagation and what would be the results? What pathogens might be introduced into otherwise healthy populations and create a biological disaster? There are still too many variables that, because of the lack of information on

the biological and ecological requirements of the Flattail, could create a decline that would be irreversible.

Habitat in the Coachella Valley supports some healthy populations of Flattails, but fragmentation due to development is rapidly taking its toll. There are also issues of off-road usage, legal and illegal, that continues to degrade the existing habitats. One idea that may be of significance is the purchase of habitats that are of significant size to support in situ Flattail populations. This would involve raising money to aid in purchasing habitat. HLCS could contact other organizations, such as the Nature Conservancy, to aid in the purchase. This would be a significant approach to conservation issues and protecting the Flattail Horned Lizard. Any comments or suggestions would be appreciated.

With the arrival of spring, comes the continued challenge of people collecting horned lizards and attempting to make them pets. New e-mails and new postings on the horned lizard forum. Same questions. Check kingsnake.com, the horned lizard forum, and witness the questions. So much education is needed.

I know there is more to discuss, but that is all I have for now. It is time to get back in the field and keep tabs on the horned lizard populations and their habitats. We are hopeful that the rains we have received will bring good results and ease the drought problems. We will see.

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Events and News

National

HLCS wishes a speedy recovery to Bette Armstrong.

The Texas Twisted website has an article on the 75th anniversary of the legend of Old Rip.
www.texastwisted.com/reports/oldrip75th

HLCS Bumper Sticker Contest

by Bill Brooks

Back in 1990 when the society was new, the Texas Chapter designed yellow bumper sticker. (See a picture on the lower right corner of the HLCS Product Order Form.) It says, "HORNY TOADS KEEP 'EM OFF THE LIST, Protected State Reptile - Texas Native"

We are about to sell out of our bumper sticker supply and I think it's time for a new design. I'd like to see what our members can do.

Requirements: (Actually, these are more guidelines rather than strict requirements.)

1) We will probably want to include our logo, title and address (much like what appears on the upper left corner of the newsletter) somewhere on the bumper sticker.

2) We would like it a little more generic, that is, we want a design that will apply to all horned lizards, not just the Texas Horned Lizard.

3) I thought a clever saying, something that will stick in your head, would be nice. Much like "I brake for horned lizards" but PLEASE!!! Not That One!

So, think about it folks. Send your entries to: HLCS, P.O. Box 122, Austin, TX 78767. Deadline: May 31, 2003. In case two entries submit the same design, the one with the earliest postmark wins. Prize: A HLCS t-shirt of your choice. All design submissions become the property of the Texas Chapter of the HLCS Society.

Texas

Lee Ann Linam is looking for judges in this year's TP&WD Home Town Horned Essay Contest. "I did this last year and it is a blast," said Bill Brooks. "I encourage anyone to help out with this wonderful project."

contact Lee Ann (lalinam@wimberley-tx.com)

The Attwater Prairie Chicken Festival
April 12-13 - National Wildlife Refuge near Sealy
contact Bill Brooks (bgbrooks@mail.utexas.edu)

The Brazos State Park Earth Day Celebration
April 19, 2003
contact Cheryl Franks
(Cheryl.Franks@amermsx.med.ge.com)

The Second Annual Hummer Butterfly
Homecoming Spring Festival
April 25-26, 2003 - Texas City
contact Bill Brooks (bgbrooks@mail.utexas.edu)

6th Annual Zoo Run Wild 5K
April 26, 2003 - Fortworth Zoo
benefitting horned lizard conservation
www.fortworthzoo.org

Earth Day's ParksFest at Auditorium Shores
April 27 - Austin
www.austinparks.org
contact Bill Brooks (bgbrooks@mail.utexas.edu)

The Song Bird Festival
May 2-4 - Lago Vista
contact Bill Brooks (bgbrooks@mail.utexas.edu)

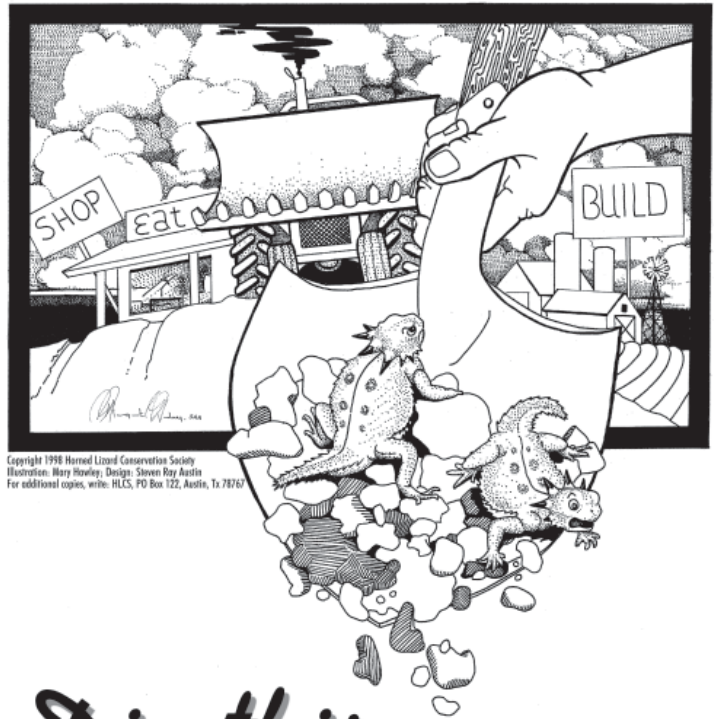
Texas Chapter meeting and Horned lizard Survey
July 12 & 13 - Near Albany, Texas.
We will do a survey on the Lambshead Ranch.
There will be programs. More info coming soon.
contact Bill Brooks (bgbrooks@mail.utexas.edu)

Horned Toad Fun Days in Kenedy
August 30 - Kenedy
contact Wade Phelps 830-583-9891

New HLCS T-Shirts

There are two new HLCS T-shirt designs based on the artwork of Mary Hawley. Available sizes are children, adult large and x-large. Shirts are \$16 each. To order or for more information, please contact Bill Brooks at:

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Flat Tail Horned Lizard
"Phrynosoma mcallii"

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In This Issue

US Fish and Wildlife Service Denies Protection of Flat-Tailed Horned Lizard page 1
 by Daniel R. Patterson

Southern California Update page 4
 by Lester G. Milroy III

Publications 2000-2002 page 5

News and Events page 6

HLCS Bumper Sticker Contact page 6
 by Bill Brooks

New HLCS T-Shirts page 7