



WILDLIFE NOTES



GRAY-CHECKERED WHIPTAIL

Gray-checked whiptails (*Cnemidophorus dixonii*) aren't just common lizards. You won't see them in a backyard rock garden, and you probably won't encounter them on a hike. They are known only from very small, isolated ranges of western Hidalgo County in New Mexico and Presidio County in the Big Bend of Texas.

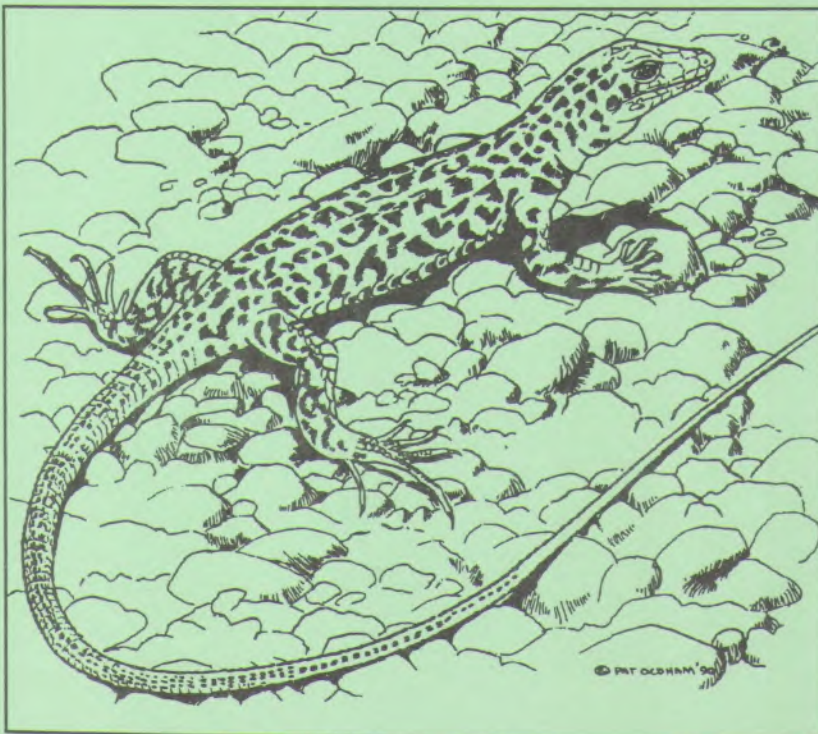
These whiptails are known by their long bodies and tails and their rapid movements. When viewed closely, these lizards show small granular scales on the top and large ones on their sides and belly that are arranged in rows. Their scale patterns distinguish whiptails from other, somewhat similar lizards in New Mexico. For example, skinks (family Scincidae) have small, shiny scales all over the body, while alligator lizards (family Anguillidae) have large scales on top as well as on their sides.

The color of the upper parts and limbs is pale brown, while the dark patterning is brown to blackish. The snout, toes and tail are unpatterned. The legs are marked with dark bars or squares. The rump region is brownish-orange. The underparts are white. The claws are light in color, and the eyes are

dark. The young resemble the adults, but their tails are blue. The total length in adults is up to 14 1/2 inches.

In New Mexico these whiptails live along a desert wash and in the surrounding creosote-bush flatlands at Antelope Pass, in the Peloncillo Mountains south of Road Forks.

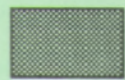
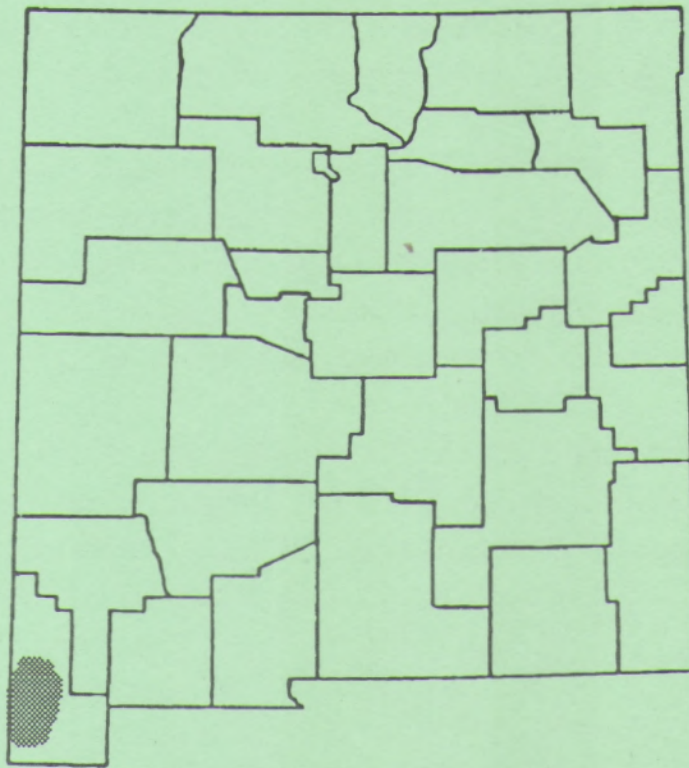
Whiptail lizards are alert, alternating between quick movements, motionless pauses and rapid dashes. They are active throughout the day, although tending to seek shade during hotter periods and sunlight during cooler ones. They seek prey in various ways, including dashing across



open areas and prowling through litter and dense growth—often in a noisy, disruptive fashion.

Gray-checked whiptails are only female, as several members of this family are. They have the ability to develop from unfertilized eggs, not requiring genetic influence from a male. Egg clutches are laid in the hotter months of the year, usually May or June. These lizards are active from spring through autumn, hibernating during the winter.

Printed 1993



Range of Gray-checked whiptail