

# Lizard Legionnaire

## Volunteers Help with Lizard Study

Picture this setting: As the morning sun warms the ground, a dinosaur descendant slowly crawls from his underground lair. He is a predator, a lizard, covered with shiny scales and sporting a long, tapered tail. After basking in the sun, our now "hot blooded" hero begins his day of sniffing out, digging up and eating insects. Such is the daily beauty and magic of our region's grassland dwelling lizards.

For 70 years the East Bay Regional Park District has been a leader at seeing the "big picture." We realize that lizards, like spokes on a wheel, radiate outward, taking us to the larger world of ecosystem health. For this reason a multi-year study is underway to identify the optimal level of grass cover that is necessary to support a healthy and diverse lizard population. Our most common grassland dwelling reptile, the Western fence lizard, is an important food item for a variety of animals including the state and federally threatened Alameda whipsnake. In addition, the Western fence lizard plays a key role in reducing the spread of Lyme disease.

Some have referred to our grasslands as tropical rainforest turned upside-down! This is because grasslands store more carbon per acre than most other ecosystems, and have a tremendous amount of biodiversity found underground. By looking beneath the surface, you'll discover an amazing array of habitat dependent birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects that inhabit our grasslands. For example, the California ground squirrel, one of the most obvious grassland species, is an "ecosystem engineer."



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A young volunteer examines the "badger" of the lizard world, a California Whiptail.

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By creating extensive underground burrow systems, the ground squirrel provides the necessary retreat and rest sites for the protected California red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, burrowing owl and San Joaquin kit fox. In addition, these areas support the foraging needs of golden eagles, bobcats, badgers, larks and lizards.

One of the lessons of wildlife conservation is that science can develop solutions, but society must embrace their application. The results of our studies are showing that lizard abundance is significantly higher in seasonally grazed grasslands than ungrazed grasslands. And more importantly, the evidence is suggesting that lizard abundance is related to grass height and thatch density.

The Stewardship staff is a science-based department. Many years of data collection has increased our knowledge of grassland dwelling raptors, amphibians and reptiles; cutting-edge computer software and pioneering radio telemetry studies have given us insights into the inner workings of our natural world. For the past seven decades, and for generations to come, the East Bay Regional Park District will continue to use its toolbox of proven techniques and adaptive management strategies to preserve and protect our region's rich natural grandeur.



### ***How you can make a tax-deductible donation to support the program:***

**Please make check payable to the Regional Parks Foundation in support of the "Lizard Legionnaire Program" and send to the Regional Parks Foundation, P.O. Box 21074, Crestmont Station Oakland, CA 94620**



**East Bay Regional  
Park District**

For information or to become a Wildlife Volunteer call or email  
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