



Amphibians & Reptiles

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RESOURCE BRIEF



PHOTO: ROBERT SHANTZ

Lesser earless lizard

Importance

Amphibians and reptiles (herps) represent an important part of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. They eat a wide variety of invertebrate species, and, in turn, they are prey for many fish, bird, and mammal species. The American Southwest is well known for its abundance and diversity of reptiles. Although this region is less known for its amphibian populations, they too can be quite abundant in some habitats and are good indicators of environmental change due to their sensitivity to a variety of factors such as pollution, introduced species, drought, habitat destruction, and disease. Herp populations may be affected by these factors and exhibit measurable changes in site occupancy, distribution, abundance, and species richness.

Status and Trends

Capulin Volcano National Monument (CAVO) is located in the northeast corner of New Mexico. Habitats at CAVO include the cinder cone, covered mainly with pinyon-juniper woodland, scrub oak and other shrubs, remnants of a ponderosa pine forest, and over 200 acres of high plains short-grass



PHOTO: ROY WOOD

Western prairie rattlesnake

prairie. Until recently, the park had not been thoroughly surveyed for herpetofauna. A 2002 inventory was undertaken by the New Mexico Natural Heritage Program (NMNHP). The inventory results provide baseline information: 1) on the current status of herps at CAVO, and 2)

for future inventory and monitoring efforts.

Eight species were documented by NMNHP during the 2002 inventory, and two species were seen by park staff; therefore, a total of 10 species have been documented at CAVO (Table 1).

Table 1. Herp species recorded during CAVO surveys, 2002.

Common Name	Scientific Name
New Mexico spadefoot toad	<i>Spea multiplicatus</i>
Lesser earless lizard	<i>Holbrookia maculata</i>
Eastern fence lizard	<i>Sceloporus undulatus</i>
Great Plains skink	<i>Eumeces obsoletus</i>
Six-lined racerunner	<i>Cnemidophorus sexlineatus</i>
Plateau striped whiptail	<i>Cnemidophorus velox</i>
Central Plains milk snake	<i>Lampropeltis triangulum</i>
Bullsnake / gopher snake	<i>Pituophis catenifer</i>
Wandering garter snake	<i>Thamnophis elegans</i>
Western prairie rattlesnake	<i>Crotalus viridis</i>

Discussion

A target list of amphibians and reptiles for CAVO, revised after the 2002 inventory, contains 34 species. Ten species (or 29% of those on the target list) have been documented at the park. Additional species may have been observed had it not been for a drought, which occurred from the winter of 2002 through early fall 2002. This drought affected other similar research and monitoring work in the Southwest. Drought typically causes herps to remain underground in refugia and wait until adequate surface moisture returns.

