Native Herptiles Field Guide

About the Ecosystem

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Field Guide

Cabrillo Guide
Cabrillo National Monument is home to 12 species of herptiles – six species of snakes, five species of lizards, and one amphibian, the Garden Slender Salamander.

Long-term monitoring of these species began in 1995 by Dr. Robert Fisher (SDSU, then USGS), as part of a larger scale study of herptile species in Southern California. National Park Service took over monitoring at Cabrillo in 2000 to continue assessments of possible decline in species’ numbers. Because the Point Loma peninsula is island-like (surrounded on three sides by ocean, and cut off by development to the north), and due to their limited home ranges, these animals are extremely susceptible to population decline and extirpation (no longer existing in a particular area where they historically were found). Eight reptile species are thought to have already been extirpated from the peninsula: Coronado Island Skink, Red Diamond Rattlesnake, Western Yellow-bellied Racer, Coast Horned Lizard, Red Coachwhip, Two-striped Gartersnake, California Glossy Snake, and the Western Long-nosed Snake.
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

**Snakes**
- Elongated, legless reptile without eyelids

**Lizards**
- Reptile typically with long body, detachable tail, four legs, and moveable eyelids

**Amphibian**
- No lungs; breathe through their skin
Reptiles - Snakes

California Kingsnake

San Diego Gopher Snake

San Diego Ring-necked Snake

California Striped Racer

San Diego Night Snake

Southern Pacific Rattlesnake
California Kingsnake
*Lampropeltis californiae*

**Active Period:** Daytime in cooler weather, night, dusk and dawn in hot weather

**Description:** 2.5 - 3.5' long with smooth, shiny scales; alternating bands or lateral stripe of black or brown and white or light yellow.

**Distribution:** Southwest North America

**Interesting Facts:** Preys upon rattlesnakes because it is immune to rattlesnake venom.
California Striped Racer
*Coluber lateralis lateralis*

**Active Period:** Daytime

**Description:** A long, thin snake with smooth scales; body is olive, gray, or black in color with two yellow or cream stripes on either side of the body that extend to the tail.

**Distribution:** California and Baja California

**Interesting Facts:** Excellent eyesight; “periscopes” in shrubs looking for prey, usually lizards. This species does not constrict, but rather chomps down on prey whole.
San Diego Gopher Snake

*Pituophis catenifer annectens*

**Active Period:** Daytime and hot nights

**Description:** Large snake with tan or light yellow body with brown or black blotches on back and sides; dark stripes in front of eyes and behind each eye.

**Distribution:** California and Baja California

**Interesting Facts:** Often misidentified as a rattlesnake because of their size and similar markings. When threatened they will flatten their head and rattle their tails.
San Diego Night Snake
*Hypsiglena ochrorhyncha klauberi*

**Active Period:** Nighttime, dusk and dawn

**Description:** Small, slender snake with narrow flat head; color matches environment - from light gray to cream with gray or brown blotches on back and sides; slit pupils.

**Distribution:** California and Baja California

**Interesting Facts:** Rear-fanged and technically venomous, but harmless to humans.
San Diego Ring-necked Snake
*Diadophis punctatus similis*

**Active Period:** Cloudy days, dusk, and at night

**Description:** Small, thin snake with smooth scales; body is black - gray - olive in color with orange band that circles the neck; underside of tail is bright red/orange.

**Distribution:** California and Baja California

**Interesting Facts:** When threatened, will flip and coil body to show off bright coloration - a deterrent to predators. Fanged and venomous, but harmless to humans.
Southern Pacific Rattlesnake
*Crotalus oreganus helleri*

**Active Period:** Nighttime when hot, daytime when warm

**Description:** Heavy-bodied pit viper with triangular head and rattled tail; brown - olive brown body with dark blotches outlined in white; dark barred tail.

**Distribution:** California and Baja California

**Interesting Facts:** Contrary to popular belief, baby rattlesnakes are NOT more dangerous than adults! This species gives live birth and hunts through heat sensing.
Orange-throated Whiptail

Great Basin Fence Lizard

Southern California Legless Lizard

San Diego Alligator Lizard

Western Side-blotched Lizard
Belding's Orange-throated Whiptail
*Aspidoscelis hypertythra beldingi*

**Active Period:** Daytime

**Description:** A slim lizard with a long slender tail and dark back with less than or equal to six white stripes. The tail can be twice the length of the body. The throat is orange.

**Distribution:** Southwest North America

**Interesting Facts:** Juveniles have a bright blue tail (as seen in right photo).
Great Basin Fence Lizard
*Sceloporus occidentalis longipes*

**Active Period:** Warm conditions

**Description:** A small lizard with spiny scales. Can appear brown, gray, or black with irregular crossbars or all black. Males have blue on the sides of belly and throat.

**Distribution:** Western North America

**Interesting Facts:** Their blood contains a protein that kills the bacteria in ticks that causes Lyme disease.
Southern California Legless Lizard
Anniella stebbinsi

Active Period: Cool conditions

Description: A small, slender lizard with no legs, smooth, shiny scales, and a blunt tail. Its back is light brown, its sides are yellow, its underside is pale yellow. There are three black stripes down its back and sides.

Distribution: Southern California and Baja Mexico

Interesting Facts: This lizard looks like a snake except it has eyelids and can detach its tail.
San Diego Alligator Lizard
*Elgaria multicarinata webbii*

**Active Period:** Daytime; nocturnal in hot weather

**Description:** A large lizard (up to 16" in length) with large, bony scales and a triangular-shaped head. Color is brown, gray, or yellow, sometimes with red or orange mixed in with 9 - 13 dark bands on the back. Eyes are light yellow.

**Distribution:** Southwest North America

**Interesting Facts:** Due to its large size and head shape, it is often mistaken for a snake at first glance.
**Western Side-blotched Lizard**
*Uta stansburiana elegans*

**Active Period:** Daytime, warm temperatures

**Description:** A small brown-gray-yellow lizard with smooth scales and often with dark spots or chevrons on back. A dark blue-black mark behind front legs gives this species its name.

**Distribution:** Western North America

**Interesting Facts:** There are three types of males: dominant males, submissive males, and sneaker males.
Amphibians

Salamander
Garden Slender Salamander  
*Batrachoseps major major*

**Active Period:** Humid and damp conditions

**Description:** A small, thin salamander with short limbs and grooves down its sides. Gray above, with a reddish, or copper color on the tail, snout and shoulders, sometimes forming blotches. Four toes on the front and back feet.

**Distribution:** Southern California and Baja California

**Interesting Facts:** Salamanders do not breathe through lungs, but through their skin and the tissue in their mouths.
Our Role

The core mission of the National Park Service is to protect and preserve natural resources, processes, systems, and values of America’s parks. Our philosophy is to protect, and restore when necessary, native ecosystems and let natural processes play out. Park Rangers and Volunteers document their observations of flora and fauna. Scientists conduct research to try to understand the status and trends of the species and systems they protect. This information is vital to advising park management and philosophy.

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To learn more about how you can help, visit:

• [NPS Website](#)
• [Field Notes](#)
Cabrillo Guide

Rules for Exploration:
• Stay on the marked trails/sidewalks
• No picking or taking of any items
• Pack it in, pack it out - No littering

Activity:
1. Walk around and see how many species of herptiles you can find.
2. Observe a herptile’s behavior for 3 minutes. What do you think it is doing?