

Urban Nature Research Center

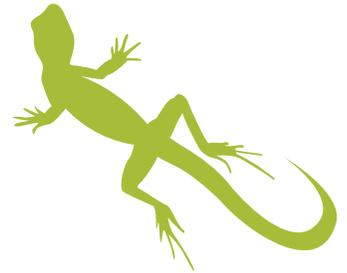
SCAVENGER HUNT



NATURAL
HISTORY
MUSEUM
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

LET'S LOOK FOR
ALLIGATOR LIZARDS

Help us study lizard behavior in your own backyard!



With days getting longer and temperatures increasing, we are entering alligator lizard mating season, and we need your help to study their mating activity.

In urban areas, including the Greater Los Angeles Area, alligator lizards are the most widespread lizards. They can be found eating grubs and slugs in compost bins; hunting for spiders, caterpillars, and crickets in gardens; and sometimes taking an accidental stroll through a living room or garage. During mating season, males search out females. The male bites the female on her neck or head and may hold her this way for several days.

Like most other species on this planet, we still have much to learn about them. In fact, just five years ago, there were only three instances of this rarely documented behavior reported in the scientific literature. Today, thanks to the help of our community scientists (i.e. people like you!), the Museum has now gathered over 400 observations—the largest dataset ever on lizard mating! But, we still need more. So get outside, soak in some spring sunshine, enjoy nature, and of course maintain social distancing—meaning that others should be looking for alligator lizards more than 6 feet away from you!

WHEN TO LOOK?

In Southern California, most of the breeding activity is between mid March and late April. This year, the season has been delayed by our rainy March, and mating pairs should be found in coastal Southern California through early May, with mating in more northern and higher elevation locations throughout May and June. For the northern alligator lizard, breeding should start in early to mid April and continue through mid-June, again with lizards in the south and at lower elevation populations breeding earlier.

WHERE TO LOOK?

Alligator lizards can be found from coastal sand dunes to high elevations in our mountains. And they do better than any other local lizard in urban areas. When in the bite hold, pairs are often found out in the open, on driveways, sidewalks, lawns, and in yards. It is also possible to find pairs several feet off the ground on fences and in shrubs.

HOW TO DOCUMENT?

Take photos! If the pair is actively wrestling, please take video as well. We are especially interested in how long pairs remain in the mating hold, so please check back every few hours and search for the pair in the general area. Then upload these to [iNaturalist](#) (if you are already an iNaturalist user) or send them to us at the Natural History Museum by emailing the photo to nature@nhm.org, or by using #NatureinLA on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), or by texting us your photos at 213.663.6632. If you have photos from previous years, please submit those as well!

Can you spot these lizards?



SOUTHERN ALLIGATOR LIZARD
Elgaria multicarinata



WESTERN FENCE LIZARD
Sceloporus occidentalis



SIDE-BLOTCHED LIZARD
Uta stansburiana



MEDITERRANEAN HOUSE GECKO
Hemidactylus turcicus



BLACK-BELLIED SLENDER SALAMANDER
Batrachoseps nigriventris



GARDEN SLENDER SALAMANDER
Batrachoseps major



LIZARD LOOK-ALIKES

These are amphibians,
but they are sometimes
mistaken as lizards.

Species Notes

Southern Alligator Lizard (*Elgaria multicarinata*)

These long, slender lizards are the most widespread lizard species in urban parts of Southern California, but they are seen less frequently because they do not conspicuously bask.

Western Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*)

These blue-bellied, medium-sized lizards have a spiny appearance due to their sharply tipped scales. People think this is the most common species across LA, but it actually doesn't do all that well with urbanization

Side-blotched Lizard (*Uta stansburiana*)

Telling side-blotched lizards from western fence lizards can be a challenge, but side-blotched lizards are smaller, with smooth granular scales on the back, and usually with the tell-tale side-blotch just behind the armpit. These were once common across much of the L.A. area, but their numbers have declined dramatically due to urbanization and the loss of open, sandy habitats.

Mediterranean House Gecko (*Hemidactylus turcicus*)

One of several nonnative gecko species becoming increasingly common in Southern California. These non-native nocturnal lizards like to hang out on walls and buildings eating insects attracted to lights.

Garden Slender Salamander (*Batrachoseps major*) and **Black-bellied Slender Salamander** (*Batrachoseps nigriventris*)

Though they are actually amphibians, these small, slimy salamanders can be found in some parts of the L.A. area and are sometimes mistaken as lizards. The garden slender salamander has a pale grey belly, and the black-bellied slender salamander has...you guessed it...a black belly. Amphibians have very sensitive skin, so please don't touch them. To get a view of the belly, use a stick to gently pick them up.