

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** ARACJ02012

**Data Sensitivity:** No

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Aspidoscelis xanthonotus* (Duellman and Lowe)

**COMMON NAME:** Red-backed Whiptail, Redbacked Whiptail, Red-backed Whiptail,  
Redback Whiptail

**SYNONYMS:** *Aspidoscelis xanthonota*, *Cnemidophorus xanthonotus*, *Cnemidophorus sacki xanthonotus*, *Cnemidophorus burti xanthonotus*, *Aspidoscelis burti xanthonotus*

**FAMILY:** Sauria: Teiidae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** de Queiroz and Reeder. 2008. Squamata: Lizards. *In* B. I. Crother (ed.), Scientific and Standard English Names of Amphibians and Reptiles of North America North of Mexico, pp. 24-45 SSAR Herpetological Circular 37. (Duellman and Lowe, 1953.)

**TYPE LOCALITY:**

**TYPE SPECIMEN:**

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** Some 25 species in genus.

**DESCRIPTION:** A large, slim lizard measuring around 3-4.5 inches (7.6-11.4 cm) from snout to vent. Stebbins (1966) reports sizes of 3.5-5.5 inches (9-14 cm) snout-vent. The tail is long and thin, and usually brown; orange in young individuals. Behler and King (1979), report the total length of the species as 11-17.7 inches (28-45 cm). The back is reddish brown to orange colored with light spots or blotches and somewhat faint stripes. There is red on the head, and the sides and legs are usually light grayish to blue gray. Stebbins (1966) reports a dark green dorsum with pale spots and no stripes on large adults, six stripes and a vertebral on smaller individuals. The back scales are small and granular. The belly is uniform gray to white, with 8 lengthwise rows of large, smooth rectangular belly scales.

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** The Giant Spotted Whiptail (*A. stictogrammus*) is larger than the Redbacked Whiptail (*A. xanthonotus*), has large light spots, and red on only the head and neck. The similar looking [Tiger Whiptail](#) is smaller and has dark gray or black mottling or reticulations on the sides and chest.

**ILLUSTRATIONS:**

Color drawing (Stebbins 1966: plate 29)

Color photo (Behler and King 1979: plate 416)

Color photo: <http://www.reptilesfaz.org/Lizards-Subpages/h-a-xanthonota.html>

**TOTAL RANGE:** Southwest-central border of Arizona, in Pima and Maricopa counties, and Northern Sonora.

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Pima County: Quitobaquito Hills, Ajo Range, and Ajo, Puerto Blanco and Agua Dulce mountains. Maricopa County: Sand Tank and Saucedá mountains.

### **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** An alert fast-moving lizard, with a diurnal activity pattern. They are most active from spring to fall, and inactive in cold temperatures and extreme heat.

**REPRODUCTION:** An oviparous lizard that lays 1-10 eggs per clutch, in early-mid summer. Eggs are laid in underground burrows/dens.

**FOOD HABITS:** Redbacked Whiptails eat insects and spiders.

**HABITAT:** In Arizona, they inhabit canyons and hills in juniper-oak woodlands, down to sonoran upland desert habitats, among dense shrubby vegetation near and on the banks of semi-arid permanent streams and arroyos. In the Saucedá Mountains, they have been observed on volcanic/rocky slopes. They follow drainages out onto bajadas. Often encountered near springs, and other water sources.

**ELEVATION:** 2000-4300 feet (610-1310 m).

**PLANT COMMUNITY:** In the Saucedá Mountains, they were observed in a community consisting of mesquite (*Prosopis*), paloverde (*Cercidium*), ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*), wolfberry (*Lycium*), and saguaro (*Cereus giganteus*).

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Apparently stable.

### **SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

<b>ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:</b>	None (USDI, FWS 1996) [C2 USDI, FWS 1994]
<b>STATE STATUS:</b>	2 (AZGFD, AWCS 2022) [1B (AGFD SWAP 2012)]
<b>OTHER STATUS:</b>	Forest Service Sensitive (USDA, FS Region 3 2013) Forest Service Sensitive (USDA, FS Region 3 1999)

None (USDI, BLM AZ 2005)  
[Bureau of Land Management Sensitive  
(USDI, BLM AZ 2000)]

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Limited distribution.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:**

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:** Distribution, population, habitat and life history studies.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** BIA – Tohono O’odham Nation; DOD – Barry M. Goldwater Air Force Range; FWS – Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge; NPS – Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.

## **SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION**

### **REFERENCES:**

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**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

**Revised:** 1991-03-19 (???)  
1997-03-05 (SMS)  
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2023-03-19 (MBL)

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