

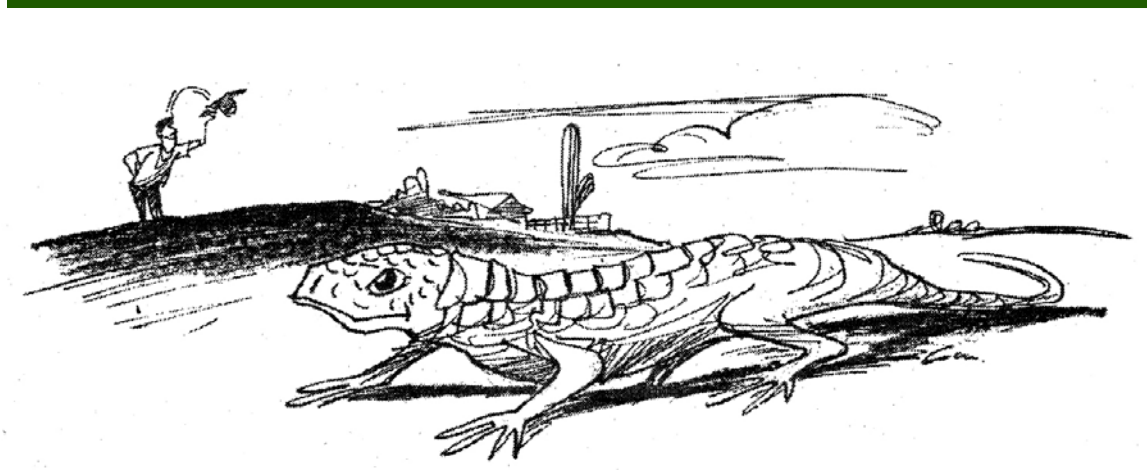
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# Who's Not Appreciated?

by: Jim Blackburn<sup>1</sup>

## LIZARDS: KIND OF NICE TO HAVE AROUND

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Question: What's the most common animal besides insects and birds we see near the house and on the trail and yet pay it almost no attention? It's a few inches to a foot long, likes the sun, dashes about very fast. How about the little lizard? You'd be hard pressed to catch one. Don't see them much in road kill. Aren't poisonous, don't attack, don't do us any damage. We don't kill them, don't spray them, don't put out poison bait for 'em. We just note their presence and otherwise ignore them.

She eats termites – that's good; she eats scorpions – that's good; she eats spiders – that's good; and she doesn't eat our plants – that's also good. Kind of nice to have around.

Need to explain “she.” You see, many of our lizards reproduce unisexually; that's called *parthenogenesis*. Many of the lizards we see are whiptails and many reproduce without males but there are some fellows around.

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<sup>1</sup> First published November 1998; illustration courtesy Bill Canfield



Whiptails are quite common here. There are several species, but I'm no expert. Slim streamlined bodied, long tails up to twice as long as the body, dark colored, squarish scales on top and rectangular ones on the belly if you look closely. Often six or seven light and dark stripes down her length sometime during her growth. She lays eggs.

The reason we see her so often is she moves about, forages during the day. At night she crawls under debris, sometimes into holes she doesn't dig, and then comes out in the morning to sun and warm up a bit. We often see her in the hottest part of the day as she scurries about. She's fast, up to 15 miles per hour. Runs wiggling her head back and forth, stops and looks back to see what scared her along. Some hold the tail off the ground. She likes rather open and rocky places where her speed is an advantage.

Next time you see a lizard, don't ignore her. Tip your hand in a little salute to this least appreciated neighbor living here in our desert.

