

SIDE-BLOTCHED LIZARD

(Uta stansburiana)

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This common lizard of the Poppy Reserve is small in size averaging 4-6 inches long from snout to tip of tail. It is generally brownish, but may be darker or lighter, and has a dark blotch located on each side of the chest just before the front leg; hence, the name. The lips and sides of the throat are often marked with alternating orange and gray to blue-gray stripes. The underside is a plain pale gray.

The degree of pigmentation varies with the sex and population. Some males can have blue flecks spread over their backs and tails and their sides may be yellow or orange. Females may have stripes along their backs/sides, or may be drab. Tail length is important in the determination of dominance hierarchies. Like other lizard species they use the tail autonomy as an escape mechanism. A reduction in the tail length also confers a loss of social status for both males and females.

Due to its small size, the lizard heats up quickly and it can be active on warm winter days while other lizards are in deep hibernation. This ability to be active in winter helps the lizard restore fat reserves, which are necessary for surviving cold periods.

Courtship: Dominant male side-blotched lizards are aggressive in defense of their territories. Upon spotting another lizard in their territory they perform “pushups”, arch their backs and extend their limbs before approaching the intruder. If the intruder is another male, they will rush him and butt or nip him to make him go away. If it is a female, this will initiate a courtship which consists of circling, flank-biting, licking, smelling, head-bobbing and eventual copulation.

The males can be divided into three different morph categories. Each of these morphs varies in how it competes for mates.

1. The orange-throated male is the “ultra dominant”. They are the largest and most aggressive and have relatively large territories and keeps a harem of females. They steal mates from the blue-throated lizards but are vulnerable to the cuckoldry of the yellow-throated female mimics.
2. Blue-throated males are “dominant”. They are medium in size and guards smaller territories. They only have one mate to defend and are better at catching the yellow-throated sneaks.