



Fact Zone

Get The Facts!

Western Fence Lizard
(*Sceloporus occidentalis*)

Fact Sheet

The Western is one of the six sub-species of fence lizard that have been described and named according to their preferred geographic location, which covers from the east to the west coast. All have similar markings and are known commonly by the generic term “blue-bellies”.

Description: Measuring up to 8 inches long including tail, it's the males who bear the distinctive markings that give this genus its common name. They vary in color from brown, which can have a sandy or olive tint, through to black, with yellow markings on the undersides of their limbs. The distinctive blue belly and throat are absent in the more drab females and juveniles. The scales are sharply keeled and somewhat spiny. The markings can appear as paired blotches, wavy lines or striping along their back. Males can often be seen displaying to attract females or to drive away other male intruders.

Habitat: California is the hub of this lizard's range which stretches into eastern and south-western Oregon, the Columbia River Gorge, south-west Idaho, all of Nevada, western Utah and north-western Baja California, including some of the coastal islands. It enjoys a wide variety of habitats from grassland, coastal sagebrush, woodland and coniferous forests, farmland and broken chaparral, from sea level to elevations in excess of 8,000 feet. Missing from this list is desert, an area that these lizards tend to avoid.

Blue-bellies can be found basking on rocks and paths, on tree trunks and branches of shrubs, in old buildings and, of course, on fence posts from where they can keep an eye out for food and predators. This preference for fairly low-level vantage points makes them easy prey for snakes, birds and small mammals. Their primary protection from threat is fast reflexes and speed, in concert with their ability to change color and become camouflaged onto their background, a trick shared by many other lizard species.

Diet: This consists of insects, spiders and other arthropods. The blue-belly is diurnal by nature and is itself a favorite dish of Kingsnakes and Striped Racers.

Reproduction: Blue-bellies mate in the spring of their second year. Females lay up to 3 clutches of between 3 and 18 eggs, more usually 8, between April and July, which hatch from July to September.