

THE DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN THE PROTECTION OF AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

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California possesses one of the richest amphibian and reptile faunas in North America. At present, 123 species (including two established introduced forms) are known to occur in the State. Because of its size and varied topography, many areas of California have been virtually untouched by herpetologists. This is supported by the discovery of the desert slender salamander (Batrachoseps aridus) in 1970, and a more recent discovery in September 1973, of a second undescribed species of salamander from the California desert. These discoveries point out the importance of preserving our wild lands. There is no way of knowing how many species remain undiscovered or how many may have been lost through the careless actions of man.

Amphibians and reptiles are important to the scientific world from an evolutionary standpoint and are excellent subjects for research. Many of them hold high aesthetic value and are commonly sought after for pets.

To my knowledge, the only amphibians or reptiles taken for sport in California are two introduced forms, the American bullfrog (Rana catesbeiana) and the spiny softshell turtle (Trionyx spiniferus). Therefore, the majority of amphibians and reptiles in California are nongame species.

Historically, the Department has paid little attention to nongame species of amphibians and reptiles. This is understandable since our programs have been supported by sportsmen through the sale of licenses and taxes on sporting gear. However, the concept of limiting management activities only to game species is changing. Interest by conservationists and the general public has created an atmosphere in which we can now direct some of our effort toward nongame species.

In 1970, the California Legislature passed two important bills, the Species Preservation Act, which directed the Department to inventory all threatened species, and the Endangered Species Act which defined "Rare" and "Endangered" and set forth regulations concerning rare and endangered species. Thirteen species of amphibians and reptiles are protected under the

California Endangered Species Act, and protective regulations have been placed on an additional 36 species.

Although our program is only two years old, we have accomplished some important tasks. Critical habitat has been purchased for two endangered species, the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander (Ambystoma macrodactylum croceum) and the desert slender salamander. Funds for the purchase of these lands were provided by the Environmental Protection Program Fund through the sale of personalized license plates. Inventory work concerning threatened species is continuing in cooperation with other governmental agencies and with college and university students and staff.

In addition to the 13 rare and endangered species, 38 species of amphibians and reptiles in California are considered to be threatened. Survival of these species is dependent upon continued cooperation between state and federal agencies and the colleges and universities. The California Department of Fish and Game hopes to assume a greater role in the protection of amphibians and reptiles in the future.

