



CRAIG BHRLE

*Northern Sagebrush Lizard*

## The Northern Sagebrush Lizard

The Northern sagebrush lizard is one of only three lizard species tough enough to inhabit the North Dakota environment.

This 5-6-inch lizard resides in the badlands almost unnoticed. A handful of sightings extending from the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, south through the badlands of Billings County and western Slope County, are all we know of its presence in the state.

The lizard gets its name because of its preference for sagebrush, though it is not shy about using other shrub habitat provided there is a good amount of bare ground for spotting prey and a few rocks for basking. Dry, sandy or rocky retreats among the brush are where you might be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of this perfectly camouflaged lizard. They are anxious creatures, however, and will escape down a rodent hole or under a rock moments after being discovered.

A surprise lies beneath this drab brown lizard – males have a vivid blue patch on each side of the belly. Females may have faint blue blemishes on the throat. Males, which are somewhat larger than females, defend their territory with great boldness, showing their strength by doing push-ups and perhaps enticing a female to watch his performance.

If his dance of head-bobbing and push-ups is up to her par, mating takes place in late spring and the female deposits an average of four eggs in early summer. By September the young have developed quite well and emerge from their earthen incubator at nearly half their eventual adult size. These young will not breed until two years of age.

On a whim, the sagebrush lizard may – albeit infrequently – ascend to the peak of a sagebrush shrub to take in the beautiful badlands scenery. On second thought, the 3-foot climb may

not be for the vista, but perhaps to scout for a dinner of ants, spiders, and other insects, or to escape from *becoming* dinner for a snake or bird of prey.

The first fall frost is a reminder for the sagebrush lizard that it is soon time to hibernate, about the only means for a cold-blooded critter to survive a North Dakota winter. Settling into an underground burrow, the lizard sleeps the cold weather away, waiting to emerge in the spring for another set of push-ups.

*Due to their rarity, please report observations of any of the three lizard species – Northern sagebrush lizard, short-horned lizard, or prairie skink – to Game and Fish Department nongame staff at (701) 328-6300, or e-mail at [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov).*

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