



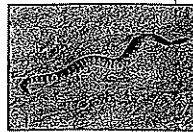
POND TURTLE



RED-EARED SLIDER
(unfortunately released at some sites)



WESTERN RATTLESNAKE



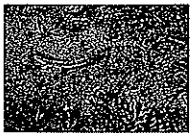
WESTERN RATTLESNAKE



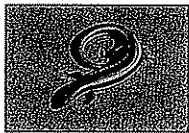
SLENDER SALAMANDER



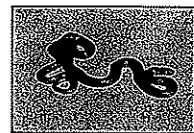
CALIFORNIA NEWT



S. ALLIGATOR LIZARD



WESTERN SKINK
(Adult)



RING-NECKED SNAKE



YELLOW-BELLIED RACER*



ARBOREAL SALAMANDER*



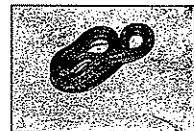
ENSATINA



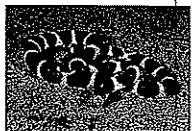
W. FENCE LIZARD
(Light)



W. FENCE LIZARD
(Dark)



HAMMOND'S GARTER SNAKE



CALIFORNIA KINGSNAKE



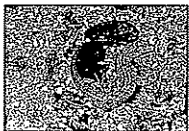
WESTERN TOAD



RED-LEGGED FROG*



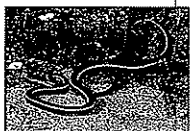
SIDE-BLOTCHED LIZARD



WESTERN WHIPTAIL



GOPHER SNAKE



STRIPED RACER*



BULLFROG



PACIFIC TREEFROG



COAST HORNED LIZARD



CALIFORNIA LEGLESS LIZARD



TERRESTRIAL GARTER SNAKE*



COMMON GARTER SNAKE

KEY-GUIDE to the REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS of the Central California Coast



GOPHER SNAKE

Many reptiles and amphibians are active during daylight hours, are still fairly common, and may be easily seen by careful observers. In some localities, however, their resident populations have been greatly depleted as their natural environments have been changed into plowed fields or residential developments. Busy traffic on our highways, and the chemicals used for various processes or for pest control, have also contributed to the decline of populations. Wherever they still occur, be careful not to harm or disturb them in any way.

This Key-Guide will help identify the more common reptiles and amphibians which occur in western Monterey, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara counties. In a general way, it will help you learn the species occurring in the area from near Monterey and Salinas southward to Lompoc and Solvang, mostly west of US Highway 101.

The "key" part of the key-guide leads you to look at certain features that identify a particular animal. The "guide" provides pictures to help confirm your identification.

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Rare or usually hidden species which may occasionally be encountered in the central coastal region of California include:
(not keyed or illustrated)

Northern Alligator Lizard
Western Patch-nosed Snake
Night Snake
California Tiger Salamander
Foothill Yellow-legged Frog
Rubber Boa
Mountain Kingsnake
Sharp-tailed Snake
Western Spadefoot
California Treefrog

Photos marked * courtesy of Dennis Sheridan

This Key is formed as a series of numbered steps, each consisting of two, three, or four descriptive statements - A, B, C, or D. To identify an unknown animal start with Step 1.

If your animal matches Step 1-A, it is a reptile, and you should proceed to step 2; however, if your animal matches Step 1-B, it is an amphibian, and you should skip over to Step 10. Continue on through the key by making appropriate choices at each Step. Identification is complete when an animal's name is reached.

The total length of a species, as usually observed in the field, is given in inches. Of course young individuals would be smaller, and older ones may be larger.

STEPS:

- 1-A** Skin covered with dry scales; toes (if present) have claws at their tips - Reptiles: Go to Step 2
- 1-B** Skin moist, without scales; NO claws at toe tips - Amphibians: Go to Step 10
-
- 2-A** Horny shell over back; 4 legs and a short tail - WESTERN POND TURTLE (At some sites, Red-eared Sliders have been introduced)
- 2-B** NO shell; 4 legs and a tail - Lizards: Go to Step 3
- 2-C** NO shell; NO legs - Snakes (or snake-like): Go to Step 5
-
- 3-A** Ridged, squarish back scales; upturned skin fold along side; dark bands across back; yellowish eyes; 7-12 in. - SOUTHERN ALLIGATOR LIZARD
- 3-B** Smooth, shiny back scales; brown and cream lengthwise stripes; tail blue or purplish; 4-8 in. - WESTERN SKINK
- 3-C** Back scales NOT ridged, squarish, or smooth - Go to Step 4

- 4-A** Back scales have pointed tips; color tan to black, may have turquoise speckles; belly with blue to black patches; back of hind legs yellowish; 4-7 in.: WESTERN FENCE LIZARD
- 4-B** Back scales granular, may show some turquoise; dark spot behind each foreleg; skin fold across the throat; 4-6 in.: SIDE-BLOTCHED LIZARD
- 4-C** Back scales granular, animal large, with very long tail; many blackish marks against a light background; pointy nose; 9-12 in.: WESTERN WHIPTAIL
- 4-D** Enlarged 'horns' around back of head; body broad, flattish, with many prickly scales; 4-6 in.: COAST HORNED LIZARD
-
- 5-A** Tail tip has series of horny rings that can be rattled; dark blotches on a lighter body color; dark rings near tail; 24-48 in.: VENOMOUS! Keep Clear! Do NOT Disturb! WESTERN RATTLESNAKE
- 5-B** NO rattle, tail blunt-ended; body silvery, metallic, smooth; belly yellowish; has eyelids; 6-8 in.: CALIFORNIA LEGLESS LIZARD
- 5-C** NO rattle, tail tip NOT blunt, but tapers to tip; Non-Poisonous Snakes (but larger ones can bite): Go to step 6
-
- 6-A** Snake with fairly uniform color above; NO distinct pattern: Go to Step 7
- 6-B** Snake with sequence of darker blotches over a lighter body color: Go to Step 8
- 6-C** Snake with lengthwise light stripes on darker body color: Go to Step 9

- 7-A** Grayish or brownish, but belly orange or reddish; an orange ring around neck; body scales smooth (NO lengthwise ridge, or keel, on each scale); 12-24 in.: RINGNECK SNAKE
- 7-B** Brownish, blackish, or olive above, white or yellowish below; body scales smooth; 18-48 in.: YELLOW-BELLIED RACER
- 7-C** Brownish, blackish, or olive above, belly whitish; body scales with a 'keel' or lengthwise ridge on each scale; NO stripe on back; 18-36 in.: HAMMOND'S GARTER SNAKE
-
- 8-A** Irregular black or brown blotches, or rings, separated by white or creamy areas; scales smooth, NOT keeled; 18-36 in.: COMMON KING SNAKE
- 8-B** Many squarish brown blotches over a tan or pale yellowish body color; dark bar below eye; scales keeled (have lengthwise ridge); 24-60 in.: GOPHER SNAKE
-
- 9-A** Blackish, with 2 lengthwise white stripes down the back; scales smooth, NOT keeled; 18-60 in.: STRIPED RACER
- 9-B** A single yellowish stripe down the back, between blackish zones with reddish spots on each side; scales keeled, NOT smooth; 18-36 in.: COMMON GARTER SNAKE
- Throat whitish, belly becoming darker toward the tail: COMMON GARTER SNAKE
- Entire belly pale, with yellowish or reddish markings: TERRESTRIAL GARTER SNAKE

- 10-A** With a tail - Salamanders Go to Step 11
- 10-B** NO tail - Frogs or Toads Go to Step 13
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- 11-A** 4 tiny legs, each with 4 teeny toes; body and tail about equally thick; 4-5 in.: SLENDER SALAMANDER (3 or 4 very similar species)
- 11-B** 4 normal looking legs; hind legs each have 5 toes: Go to Step 12
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- 12-A** Brownish back, belly orange or yellowish; 5-7 in.: CALIFORNIA NEWT
- 12-B** Brownish back, whitish below; cheeks broad, swollen; may have scattered whitish spots on back; 4-7 in.: ARBOREAL SALAMANDER
- 12-C** Reddish-brown above; legs orange near body; tail constricted near its base; 3-5 in.: ENSATINA
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- 13-A** Skin bumpy, warty; light line down middle of back; 2-5 in.: WESTERN TOAD
- 13-B** Skin smoother; NO light line down middle of back: Go to Step 14
-
- 14-A** Ridge runs back from each eye; dark mask across eye; 2-5 in.: RED-LEGGED FROG
- 14-B** NO ridges on back; prominent eardrum behind each eye; nose usually green; 3-8 in.: BULLFROG
- 14-C** NO back ridges, NO prominent eardrum; dark mask across eyes; toes end in small pads; 1-2 in.: PACIFIC TREEFROG