

Western Spadefoot

Scaphiopus hammondi
Family Pelobatidae



Global Rank: G3

State Rank: S3 (CA)

Distribution: In the Great Valley of California, bordering foothills, and Coast Ranges south of San Francisco Bay, into Baja California to Mesa de San Carlos. Elevations usually below 3,000 ft. (910 m.).

Description: Adults reach to 2 1/2 in. (6.2 cm.) in snout-vent length. There is no cranial boss between the eyes. Coloration above is dusky green or gray, often with four irregular, light-colored stripes on the back. The central pair sometimes set off a dark, hourglass-shaped area. Skin tubercles are tipped with orange or reddish. The eye (iris) is usually pale gold. The body is whitish below, without markings. A wedge-shaped, glossy black spade is on each hind foot. The distance between the eyes is usually less than the width of the eyelid. The voice is hoarse, snore-like, and it may call from a floating position.

Reproduction: Eggs laid in vernal pools, ponds, and occasionally in slow streams from February to April, with peak activity in March. Mean clutch size is 400 (range 300 to 500).



Current range of the western spadefoot

Food: Feeds on insects and other invertebrates, usually from the surface of ponds.

Habits: Primarily a species of the lowlands, frequenting washes, floodplains of rivers, alluvial fans, playas, and alkali flats. Also ranges into the foothills and mountains. Prefers areas of open vegetation and short grasses, where the soil is sandy or gravelly. Found in valley and foothill grasslands, open chaparral, and pine-oak woodlands.

Management Implications: Now extinct throughout much of lowland southern California. Most habitat loss due to agricultural conversion. When handled, this toad may smell like roasted peanuts and its skin secretion may cause sneezing.

Important References: Stebbins, R.C. 1985. A field guide to western reptiles and amphibians. The Peterson Field Guide Series. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, NY; Verner, J., and A.S. Boss. 1980. California wildlife and their habitats: western Sierra Nevada. USDA Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station, GTR PSW-37, Berkeley, CA.