

Grant used to study reptile reproduction

By Laura Castleberry

Over two thousand lizards will be invading UNL this spring and summer as part of a study on the evolution of life history strategies on the control of reproductive maturity in lizards.

The National Science Foundation awarded Royce E. Ballinger, UNL associate professor of life sciences a \$60,000 grant in February for the study.

The study, Ballinger said, is to find out at what age lizards become reproductive, why some mature early and others later, and examine the characteristics of each.

Ballinger said that this study is important in scientific research because "the population in the ecology of lizards and the rate and age that they mature can be related to the growth rate of (human) population."

"To understand how systems in nature work and how alterations in the nature system can affect our survival, it's important to learn about specific animals and their habits."

The type of lizard that will be tested and used in the experiment is the Milton Spineless which lives in the mountains and deserts of Southeastern Arizona. They average about five inches in length.

Ballinger said that the range of altitudes in Arizona provides a variety of environments and characteristics for studying the lizards.

Ballinger has done research in the southwest deserts and has his Ph.D. in Ecology and Statistics from Texas A & M. He has studied lizards since 1964.

In April and May, Ballinger and others will travel to Arizona and capture lizards to bring back to Nebraska. Half of them will be taken from high altitudes and half from low altitudes. From there they will determine the reproductive characteristics of the lizards on a genetic basis.

The lizards will be kept in two environmental chambers that hold 54 lizards at a time, and followed from birth to the reproductive season. The lizards will be subjected to different altitudes, food regimens and activity programs.

The results will be recorded for study.

Ballinger said the \$60,000 will be spent for equipment in the study, lab work, a full-time lab assistant and travel expenses for obtaining the lizards.

Ballinger said that although the value of the study is not easily measured in layman's terms, the study will provide predictions on what will happen if ecology is disturbed or altered and the consequences of it.

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