

FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

The Spot-tailed Earless Lizard



Photo: Wayne Van Devender

A REPTILE AT RISK

Spot-tailed earless lizards are in grave danger of extinction. Researchers are having trouble locating even a handful across the species' range in central and southern Texas. The southern subspecies of the spot-tailed earless lizard may already be extinct. Scientists believe agricultural chemicals are the top threat to the lizards along with loss of habitat to cropland and development. Predation by imported red fire ants is also a threat.

PROTECTING THE PRAIRIE

Spot-tailed earless lizards live in open areas of low grass and shrub vegetation with patches of bare ground. But their native prairie habitat is disappearing as humans increase farming, urbanization, and suburbanization.

KNOW YOUR LIZARD

- **The Importance of Being Earless:** Despite the name, earless lizards can hear and do have ears, though no external ear openings. This trait likely helps them burrow underground without getting dirty ears.
- **Little Ant, Big Bite:** Though spot-tailed earless lizards eat insects, including ants, reptiles across the south have proven no match for the imported red fire ant. The ants swarm, bite, and devour lizards—as well as alligators, snakes, and turtles—until only the bones are left.
- **In Need Indeed:** Though careening toward extinction, spot-tailed earless lizards are not legally protected. Protection under the Endangered Species Act provides their best hope for survival for future generations.

CLIMATE CHAOS

Spot-tailed earless lizards are adapted to the harsh conditions. But they may not be able to handle the weather extremes climate change is already causing. The lizard's range may get hotter and drier but also wetter. The lizard loses in either scenario. They may not be able to keep their skin moist enough during longer, hotter droughts. More rain would increase plant growth and height, forcing the animals out of their territory.

