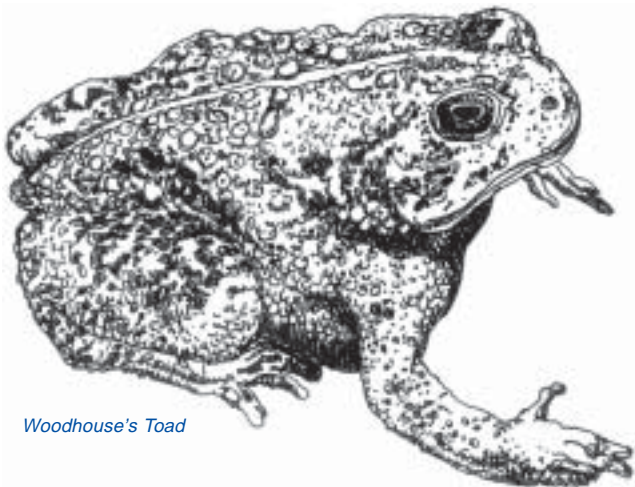




Bullfrog

Amphibians: The Frogs

At present only one true frog species inhabits the Rio Bosque. The **Bullfrog** (*Rana catesbeiana*) is a common denizen of the river valley that is more often heard than seen. Bullfrogs are associated with riparian areas and wetlands, where they eat insects, other frogs and toads, as well as small mammals, birds and reptiles. During the warmer months, you may get a chance to hear Bullfrogs calling in a deep-pitched bellow as they try to attract mates.



Woodhouse's Toad

What is a "herp"?

Herpetology is the branch of zoology dealing with **reptiles** and **amphibians**. From this formal word, the shorthand term "herps" has come into common use for referring to these two classes of animals together. Both have their origin in the Greek root *herpeton*: a crawling thing.

Reptiles and amphibians are all vertebrate tetrapods ("four-legs" – even snakes which "lost" their legs millions of years ago). Generally, amphibians produce naked, unprotected eggs that must be laid in water to avoid desiccation. Reptile eggs are surrounded by protective membranes and usually an outer shell, so they can be deposited on land with less risk of drying out.



Couch's Spadefoot Toad

Amphibians: The Toads

Currently, three species of toad have been recognized at the Rio Bosque. **Woodhouse's Toad** (*Bufo woodhousei*) is a common species often seen near the water delivery canals. These toads are primarily insectivores and perform a great service as natural biological control agents for insect pests. **Couch's Spadefoot Toads** (*Scaphiopus couchi*) live dormant underground for most of the year; following a large summer rain shower, they emerge for a frenzy of feeding and breeding which may last only a few days. As the weather dries out, the toads dig themselves back into the soil to await next year's monsoon season. They are greenish in color with a vertical pupil, smooth skin and a black "spade" on their hind feet which they use for digging.

The Rio Grande Leopard Frog (*Rana berlandieri*) has not been seen in the El Paso area for many years. Habitat created at the Rio Bosque would be key to the re-introduction of this species.



On the Cover: A Spadefoot Toad sits near a stream.

Wetlands and riverside forests once graced the banks of the Rio Grande in the Paso del Norte region. They were the area's most productive natural habitats, but today they are virtually gone. At Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, the environment is still changing, but in a new way. Here, a diverse partnership is working to bring back meaningful examples of the unique and valuable ecosystems once found in our river valley.

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HERPS

of the Rio Bosque



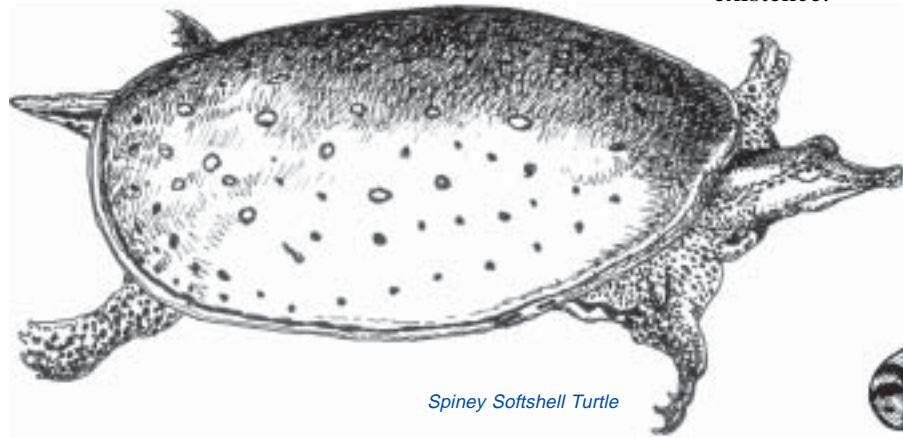
Rio Bosque Wetlands Park

El Paso, Texas

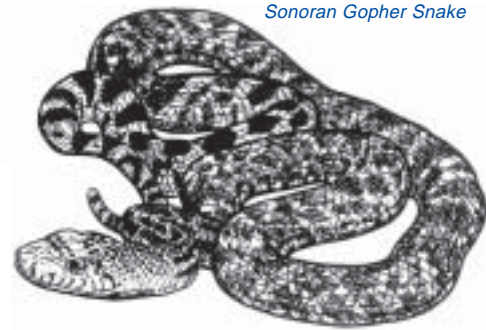
Reptiles and amphibians tend to be secretive. Go quietly and keep your senses alert: you will likely be rewarded with an opportunity to observe the behavior of these fascinating creatures.

Reptiles: The Turtles

At present two species of turtle have been identified within the park: the **Spiny Softshell Turtle** (*Trionyx spiniferus*) and the **Yellow Mud Turtle** (*Kinosternon flavescens*). Spiny Softshell Turtles can be seen basking in the sun on exposed sand bars in the Riverside Canal along the east side of the park. They have a unique appearance: their bodies are flattened like a large “pancake,” their necks are long and their noses shaped like snorkels. All of these features are adaptations for an aquatic existence.



Spiny Softshell Turtle



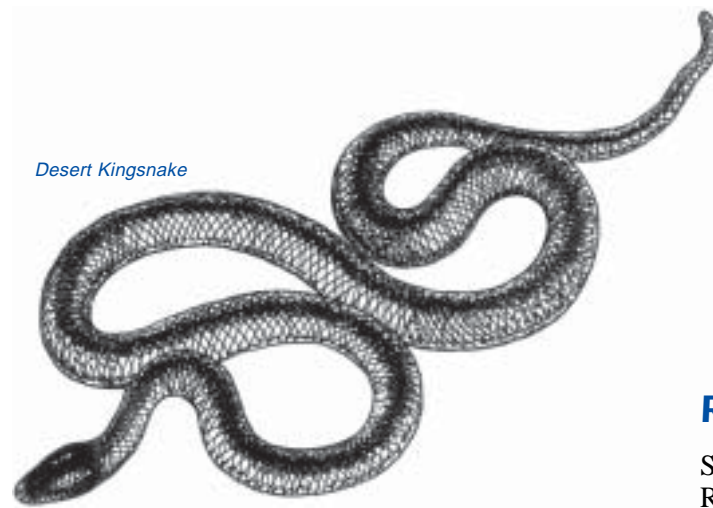
Sonoran Gopher Snake



Coachwhip Snake



Checkered Garter Snake

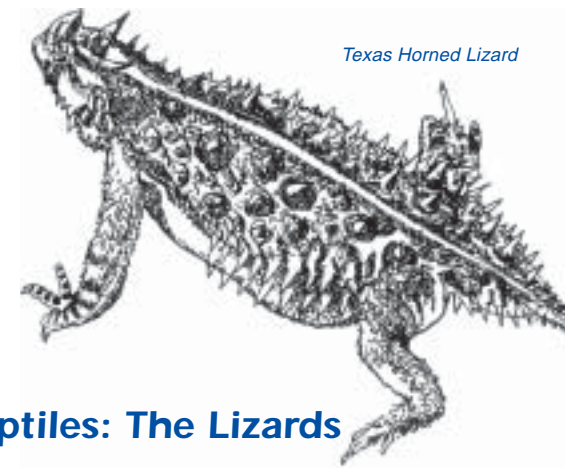


Desert Kingsnake

Reptiles: The Snakes

Of the eight snake species confirmed at the Rio Bosque, four are occasionally encountered during daylight hours, usually in the morning or early evening. The **Desert Kingsnake** (*Lampropeltis getula splendida*), the **Sonoran Gopher Snake** (*Pituophis melanoleucus affinis*) and the **Coachwhip Snake** (*Masticophis flagellum*) can be found throughout the park. The **Checkered Garter Snake** (*Thamnophis marcianus*), however, is more closely associated with the wetland areas, where it feeds on fish, frogs and insects.

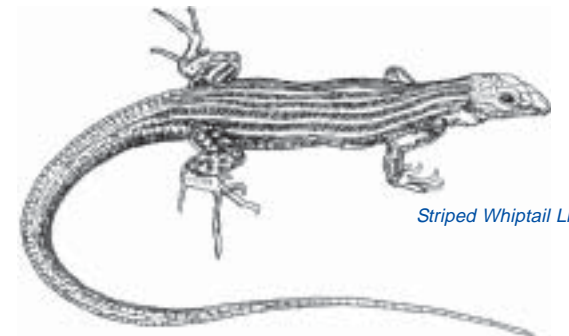
All snakes play an extremely important role in the natural control of their prey species; in the absence of these predators, populations can skyrocket to levels that stress the resources of an ecosystem. No venomous snake has yet been documented at the Rio Bosque.



Texas Horned Lizard

Reptiles: The Lizards

Six species of lizard have been identified at the Rio Bosque. The **Striped Whiptail Lizard** (*Cnemidophorus inornatus*) is commonly encountered and can be identified readily by its slim, elongate appearance and bright blue tail. Another widespread species is the **Side Blotched Lizard** (*Uta stansburiana*). This lizard displays an interesting behavior: individuals appear to do “push ups” to intimidate rivals and defend their territories. The **Texas Horned Lizard** (*Phrynosoma cornutum*), sometimes incorrectly referred to as a horned toad, is the Texas State Reptile. Horned lizard populations seem to be declining in parts of their range, so we are fortunate to have some representatives residing at Rio Bosque.



Striped Whiptail Lizard



Side Blotched Lizard

As a large undeveloped natural area, Rio Bosque Wetlands Park provides valuable habitat for many types of wildlife, including a variety of reptiles and amphibians. Approximately 20 different species have been identified in the park to date. This diversity is made possible by a diversity of micro-habitats within the park. Some species, such as the **Bullfrog**, rarely stray far from the wetland areas and water delivery canals. Others, like the **Striped Whiptail Lizard**, are encountered throughout the park.

For a complete list of reptiles and amphibians found at the park, stop by the Visitor Center or log onto the Rio Bosque website:
www.cerm.utep.edu/riobosque/