

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Food Habits of the Chuckwalla, *Sauromalus obesus*¹

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During April 1938 the writer collected twelve chuckwallas in order to make a study of the food habits of this species. Specimens were collected in creosote bush and ocotillo associations at Borego Mountain, Tubbs Canyon, and Palm Canyon in San Diego County, California.

Stomachs of the Borego Mountain specimens contained stems and leaves of *Phacelia* sp. [the Phacelias, which include the Desert Primrose, the Wild Heliotropes, and the Desert Bells]; leaves, stems and blossoms of *Franseria dumosa* [= *Ambrosia dumosa*, the Burro Bush, Burro Weed, or White Bursage]; leaves of *Encelia farinosa* [Brittlebush]; leaves and a seedling of *Eriogonum* sp. [Buckwheat]; leaves of *Ditaxis lanceolata* [Narrowleaf Silverbush]; blossoms and leaves of *Larrea divaricata* [a Creosote Bush]; and the blossoms of *Fouquieria splendens* [Engelmann Ocotillo] which the lizards had picked up around the bases of these plants. Sand was also found in the stomachs which contained the *Fouquieria* blossoms. Specimens from Borego Mountain seemed to prefer the leaves and stems of *Franseria dumosa* as their stomachs were filled largely with the leaves and stems of this plant.

The stomachs of the 8 specimens from Tubbs Canyon con-

tained leaves of *Encelia farinosa*; leaves, seed-pods and stems of *Lotus* sp. [the Trefoils]; leaves of *Phacelia* sp., seedling of *Festuca* sp. [a Fescue]; blossoms, leaves and stems of *Cryptantha* sp. [the Cryptanthas or White Forget-me-nots]; and the blossoms, leaves and stems of *Lotus strigosus* [Strigose Bird's-foot Trefoil]. These specimens showed equal taste for *F. dumosa* and *E. farinosa*.

The single specimen collected at Palm Canyon contained several large blossoms, about 10 x 15 mm. when pressed, of *Chenactis* sp. [the Pincushions]; one blossom of *Cryptantha* sp.; and the blossoms of *Tropidocarpum gracile* [Slender Tropidocarpum, a Mustard].

No animal remains were found in any of the stomachs.

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An adult *Sauromalus ater* from the foothills of the Sierra de Las Asemblea, northern Baja California. *Encelia farinosa* (Brittlebush) and *Franseria dumosa* (White Bursage) are visible in the background; both are eaten by Chuckwallas. Photograph by L. Lee Grismer.