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# Reproductive Strategies

## Animal Profile:

### **DESERT GRASSLANDS WHIPTAIL LIZARD** (*Aspidoscelis uniparens*)

Nothing is ever what it seems in the world of reproduction. Take the example of the desert grassland whiptail, a species of lizard that lives in the southwestern United States. These lizards have long sleek bodies with lines that go from nose to tail. They race around in the dry leaves and branches eating termites, grasshoppers, beetles and many other insects. Like normal lizards, the whiptails perform courtship, mate and lay their eggs.



NPS - Sally King

Sounds pretty ordinary, right? But if we took a closer look, we'd find that not a single one of these lizards is a male! This all-female whiptail species is able to reproduce without fertilization, a process that is called parthenogenesis.

In this species, females take turns playing male during courtship and mating. If the “female” is interested, the “male” will wrap around her and grip “his” jaws around her body. The couple will stay like this for 5 to 10 minutes. This is called pseudocopulation or false mating, because no males or sperm are involved.

The “female” from this mating pair will eventually lay her eggs, which all hatch into copies of their mom. Females will “mate” and lay 2 to 3 eggs about 3 times over the breeding season. It turns out that females who lay eggs after “mating” with another female lay more eggs than females who don't mate. Laying a few more eggs is definitely an advantage in the harsh desert where survival of the young is difficult.



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Two female desert grasslands whiptail lizards engaged in pseudocopulation.