

Do vertebral-line patterns in two horned lizards (*Phrynosoma* spp.) mimic plant-stem shadows and stem litter.

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Do vertebral-line patterns in two horned lizards (*Phrynosoma* spp.) mimic plant-stem shadows and stem litter?

Wade C. Sherbrooke *

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Abstract

All species of the genus *Phrynosoma* are cryptically colored and patterned, but two species have bold black or white vertebral-line patterns on their dorsal surfaces.

Phrynosoma mcallii lives on aeolian-sand substrates and often rests below shrubs. It has a black vertebral line which is hypothesized to mimic dark shadows of stems falling on the smooth, litter-free sand beneath shrubs. *Phrynosoma cornutum* inhabits grasslands and arid shrub-habitats in which below-shrub sites are littered with bleached plant stems. The white middorsal stripe of this species is thought to mimic white stems of the under-shrub litter. Although crypticity in horned lizards has been extensively studied, the two examples of apparent object mimicry described herein have not been reported previously.



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Keywords

horned lizards; *Phrynosoma cornutum*; *Phrynosoma mcallii*; vertebral line; color pattern; mimicry; microhabitat; object mimicry

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* E-mail: wcs@amnh.org

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