DISCOVERY OF THE PARTHENOGENETIC COLORADO CHECKERED WHIPTAIL, *ASPIDOSCELI S NEOTESSELATA* (SQUAMATA: TEIIDAE), IN WASHINGTON STATE

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Whiptail lizards of the genus *Aspidoscelis* (formerly *Cnemidophorus*; Reeder and others 2002), occur throughout the southern and southwestern United States, with the ranges of some species extending into southeastern Oregon and adjacent Idaho. Throughout their composite range, whiptail lizards are associated with dry, open habitats, particularly desert, grassland, and shrub-steppe (Stebbins 2003). They are diurnal, active, and widely-foraging heliothermic reptiles that prey on invertebrates, and occasionally small vertebrates. Several species of *Aspidoscelis* are unisexual, comprising solely females, and reproduce by parthenogenesis, a form of asexual reproduction in which offspring are genetically identical to their diploid, triploid, or tetraploid mothers (Wright 1993; Persons and Wright 2009; Lutes and others 2011). Of the 22 currently recognized species of *Aspidoscelis* found in the United States (Persons and Wright 2009), 11 reproduce parthenogenetically (Reeder and others 2002). These populations may occur in limited areas unoccupied by sexual species and in disturbed habitats, but some parthenogenetic species of *Aspidoscelis* are also widely syntopic with sexual species. In fact, parthenogens that occupy these areas are “weeds” in the botanical sense, thriving in habitats ecologically unavailable to sexual whiptail species (Wright and Lowe 1968). Some unisexual species (for example: Gray-checkered Whiptail, *Aspidoscelis dixoni*; New Mexico Whiptail, *Aspidoscelis neomexicana*) are widely distributed, with disjunct populations occurring well outside of their primary range (Manning and others 2005; Cordes and Walker 2006).

In the Pacific Northwest there are 2 species of whiptail lizard, Western Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tigris*) and Plateau Striped Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis velox*). The former is a native bisexual species found throughout North American deserts from southeastern Oregon and southern Idaho, south into mainland Mexico and Baja California (Stebbins 2003). *Aspidoscelis velox* is an introduced, unisexual species whose natural range is the Colorado Plateau region of northern Arizona, southwestern Colorado, northwestern New Mexico, and southeastern Utah (Stebbins 2003). In the Pacific Northwest, *A. velox* is known only from Cove Palisades State Park, Jefferson County, Oregon (Nussbaum and others 1983) to which it was probably first introduced in the 1960s (St John 2002).

The Colorado Checkered Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis neotesselata*) was described in 1997 and is endemic to southeastern Colorado (Walker and others 1997a). *Aspidoscelis neotesselata* is a parthenogenetic species that originated as the result of hybridization between a diploid unisexual Common Checkered Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tesselata*), and a diploid sexual species, Six-lined Racerunner (*A. sexlineata*). The result of reproduction between a unisexual and a sexual species is an extra set of chromosomes possessed by *A. neotesselata*, resulting in triploidy. Within the limited natural range of *A. neotesselata* in a 4-county area, it is known from scattered localities along the Arkansas River and tributaries. Like many other parthenogenetic species, *A. neotesselata* inhabits disturbed areas such as canyonlands, campgrounds, and heavily grazed pastureland.