



FACT SHEET

INLAND TAIPAN *Oxyuranus microlepidotus*

The Inland Taipan has the most potent venom of any land snake on earth, but fortunately it is usually quite shy and has a placid disposition. It may remain still when approached quietly, but caution should be exercised and a safe distance maintained as it can inflict a *potentially fatal bite*.

Inland Taipans typically feed on small to medium-sized mammals, and seem to show a preference for rodents, including the Long-haired Rat (also known as the Plague Rat) and Plains Rats.

When hunting, Taipans kill their prey by delivering a fatal dose of venom with a single bite and then retreat, returning only once the animal has died. This behaviour helps the snake avoid injury from aggressive animals such as the Long-haired Rat.

IDENTIFICATION

The Inland Taipan is usually most active in the morning, basking and foraging in, and near, soil cracks. In cooler weather it is active in the afternoon and in hot weather it becomes nocturnal.

Its round-snouted head and neck are darker than its body (glossy black in winter, dark brown in summer) while its back, sides and

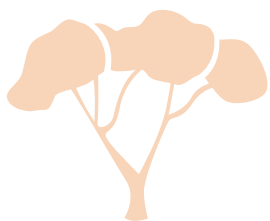
tail are various shades of brown - with many scales having a wide blackish, lower-front edge. These dark marks are aligned in diagonal chevrons of variable length that are inclined backward and downward.

The lowermost lateral scales often also have a yellow edge. Its belly can range from cream to yellow with indistinct reddish blotches. All scales are smooth, very glossy and without keels, and there are 23 rows of scales at midbody. Its eye has a blackish brown iris without a noticeable coloured rim around the pupil.

HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION

The Inland Taipan has been recorded in flood plains with deep-cracking clays and loams, and so-called black soils. It is also found in the adjoining gibber plains, dunes and rocky outcrops of the Cooper and Diamantina Creeks and their tributaries. It also occurs on the gypseous cracking clay plains to the west of Lake Eyre, with a number of records from near Coober Pedy.

Taipans shelter in rat burrows and in deep soil cracks and gilgais. Plant cover in these areas can include sparse chenopod shrubs and ephemeral grasses, and sometimes trees and lignum near flow channels.



Inland Taipans. Photographs by John Read.





CONTACT US

South Australian Arid
Lands Natural Resources
Management Board

www.saalnm.sa.gov.au

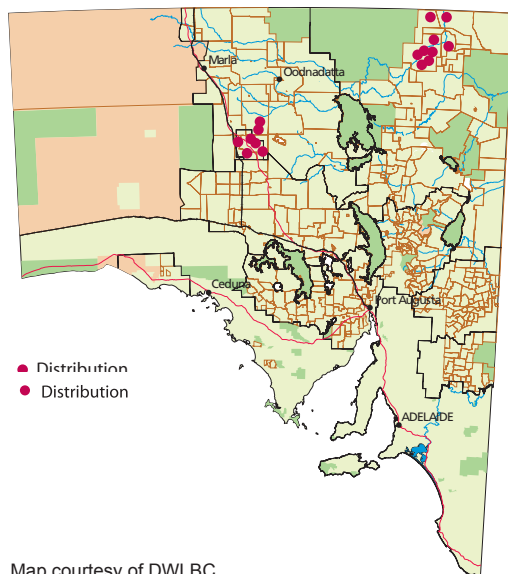
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Australian Government

INLAND TAIPAN DISTRIBUTION IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Map courtesy of DWLBC

POTENTIAL THREATS TO INLAND TAIPAN

The Inland Taipan is thought to have already disappeared from some parts of its former habitats in other states. Since it is a top-level predator it is also vulnerable to the risks of any reduction in the availability of prey. Since European settlement, changes in land use and subtle climatic changes are likely to have made formerly inhabited areas unsuitable for this species.

As yet, it has not been given a conservation status rating, but since so little is known of this species its situation and rating are likely to require revision in the future.

CURRENT RESEARCH

A better understanding and further information about the distribution of the Inland Taipan is needed. There are known locations in north-eastern South Australian and also to the west of Lake Eyre, but little else is known of their distribution.

Many of the mammal species preyed upon by the Inland Taipan are subject to

significant population fluctuations as a result of seasonal conditions and environmental changes. The impact this has on Inland Taipan populations needs to be understood in order to more effectively manage this top-order predator.

Understanding the impact of introduced predators and competition is also likely to have a critical role in managing Inland Taipan numbers.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

If you think you have seen an Inland Taipan within or beyond the locations shown on the distribution map please let us know. Note the location so that your record can be used to find the same place again. A GPS or map reference is usually the most helpful, as would be any description of the habitat.

The South Australian Arid Lands NRM Board follows up all possible sightings as part of its study of the Inland Taipan. Road-killed specimens are also welcomed and advice can be provided as to the best means for preserving and sending specimens.

HOW CAN YOU CONTACT US?

To report your observation or for further information about the Inland Taipan or this study please contact:

Community Fauna Officer

P. 08 8671 1083

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RESOURCES

Ehmann, H. (2006). South Australian Rangelands and Aboriginal Lands Wildlife Management Manual: a resource handbook. Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, South Australia.

Brandle, R. (ed) (1998). A biological survey of the stony deserts of South Australia 1994–1997. Department for Environment Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs, South Australia.



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