REPTILE

Egernia cunninghami — Cunningham's Skink

AUS	SA	AMLR	Endemism	Residency
-	E	V	-	Resident

Photo: © Peter Robertson

Conservation Significance

In SA, the majority of the distribution is confined within the AMLR, disjunct from the remaining extant distribution in other States. Within the AMLR the species' relative area of occupancy is classified as 'Extremely Restricted'.[4]

Description

Large skink, up to 150 mm (snout-vent). Tail more or less round in section, tapering gently, about 100% of snout-vent length.[3] Scales on the back, flanks and tail have a single, sharp, spiny keel which is exaggerated more on the tail giving it an almost spiky appearance.[3]

Subject to considerable geographic colour and pattern variation. Grey-brown, olive-brown, through various shades of brown to black above which may be uniform in pattern or may have a conspicuous pattern made up of dark brown scales and white or cream flecks or spots. Head often somewhat paler than body, particularly in young, and often with scattered whitish spots. Tail usually ringed with darker brown, the paler interspaces often white in the young. Whitish below, usually with dark brown transverse bars or variegations on the throat.[3]

Distribution and Population

Exists as an isolated sub-population in the AMLR. The nearest related colonies are in the western sections of the Great Dividing Range in VIC, from where it extends within these ranges to the north just south of Brisbane. This isolation, combined with the fragmented and discontinuous nature of the steep rock faces and boulder slopes where it lives, explain the threatened status in SA.

Within the SMLR, the species is divided into two sub-populations. One is restricted to the coastal cliffs and nearby islands off the Fleurieu Peninsula from Cape Jervis to Victor Harbor, and the other occurs on the steeper western MLR escarpment from Torrens Gorge to Parawa on the southern Fleurieu. The sub-populations were probably continuous prior to European settlement.[1]

Post-1983 AMLR filtered records from the central Adelaide Hills with additional records from Onkaparinga River NP, Deep Creek CP and West Island CP[4]

Appears to have disappeared from the Adelaide Hills Face Zone around Belair and Blackwood, where they were known to occur in the 1970s, probably as a result of the increased urbanisation. Still occurs in nearby Sturt Gorge CP.[1]

Pre-1983 AMLR filtered records scattered from Gawler and Lyndoch in the north to Deep Creek and Fishery Beach in the south.[4]

Habitat

Found in rocky outcrops with large crevices in higher rainfall open woodland (M. Hutchinson *pers. comm.*).

Within the AMLR the preferred broad vegetation groups are Grassy Woodland, Coastal and Heathy Forest.[4]

In some situations Blackberry may provide beneficial cover although dense infestations could reduce the number of suitable basking sites (K. Long *pers. comm.*).

Biology and Ecology

Feeds on fruit and seeds, arthropods and small vertebrates. Juveniles feed predominantly on insects and other invertebrates, but the proportion of plant material increases over time with adults being almost entirely herbivorous. [2]

Usually produces four to six young in a litter.[3]

Aboriginal Significance

Post-1983 records indicate the majority of the AMLR distribution occurs in Kaurna Nation. It also occurs in Peramangk and Ngarrindjeri Nations.[4]

Further information:
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Government of South Australia

Prepared as part of the Regional Recovery Plan for Threatened Species and Ecological Communities of Adelaide and the Mount Lofty Ranges, South Australia 2009 - 2014

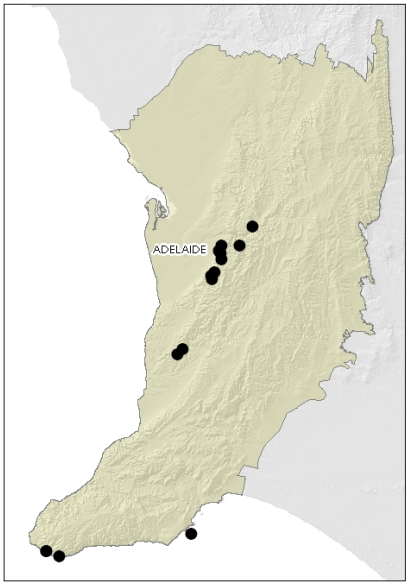
Threats

Potential threats include:

- habitat loss (rock removal)
- illegal hunting and collection
- predation by foxes and cats
- site/habitat disturbance (livestock and rock climbers)
- pesticides
- fire and fire management activities
- climate change and drought (M. Hutchinson *pers. comm.)*
- mining may also pose a threat to some sub-populations (D. Armstrong *pers. comm.*).

Additional current direct threats have been identified and rated for this species. Refer to the main plan accompanying these profiles.

Regional Distribution



Map based on filtered post-1983 records.[4] Note, this map does not necessarily represent the actual species' distribution within the AMLR.

References

Note: In some cases original reference sources are not included in this list, however they can be obtained from the reference from which the information has been sourced (the reference cited in superscript).

1 Armstrong, D. M., Croft, S. N. and Foulkes, J. N. (2003). *A Biological Survey of the Southern Mount Lofty Ranges, South Australia, 2000-2001*. Department for Environment and Heritage, South Australia.

2 Chapple, D. G. (2003). Ecology, life-history, and behaviour in the Australian Scincid genus *Egernia*, with comments on the evolution of complex sociality in lizards. *Herpetological Monographs* 17: 145-180.

3 Cogger, H. G. (2000). *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia (Sixth Edition)*. Reed New Holland.

4 Department for Environment and Heritage (2007). *Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Regional Recovery Pilot Project Database*. Unpublished data extracted and edited from BDBSA, SA Herbarium (July 2007) and other sources.

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