



MEDIA RELEASE

Rare Lizard Found on Reserve

An endangered skink found on a Northern Territory Government-made reserve in central Australia has secured improved research.

The Slater's skink, *Egernia slateri* also known as the Floodplain skink, was thought to possibly be extinct until targeted surveys were carried out by Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) staff in 2004.

NRETA threatened species scientist, Dr Chris Pavey, said Owen Springs Reserve was targeted after reports by an amateur herpetologist who had sighted burrows in habitat that appeared to be suitable for the species.

Dr Pavey said the total population of this species might be 200 or less and this discovery provided NRETA scientists with an important ongoing research site.

"The reserve ensures the population will remain secure and if managed properly will safeguard this species," he said.

"Since the discovery of the species on this reserve, we have developed a better understanding of the skink's behavior and developed techniques to improve population estimates.

"There are many burrowing animals in arid Australia and it can be difficult to distinguish which animal lives in which burrow, without digging up the burrow to correctly identify them.

"We now know the habitat in which the skinks prefer to burrow and have a good knowledge of the times of day they come out to bask.

"Using binoculars to observe them we can identify individual skinks by location, size, and body and tail markings, giving us a better indication about how many are present and whether they move between burrows.

"So far Owen Springs is the only location where we have observed young lizards, which is a very good sign."

Parks and Wildlife Service chief district ranger for the western district Chris Day said the Reserve was a multi-use area with a large range of conservation values.

"The area is popular with locals, with a diversity of flora and fauna including Red kangaroos and Euros, as well as a large proliferation of birds, often seen in the Reserve" Mr Day said.

"However, the Reserve is also home to many species that are rarely seen, such as this lizard.

"Other threatened species on the Reserve include the Australian bustard, Emu and black-footed rock wallaby.

“Parks and Wildlife Service rangers at Owen Springs Reserve work closely with conservation scientists to ensure the survival of endangered species, such as the Slater’s skink.

“After the discovery of rare species, it is important that we work with the researchers to determine the best way of managing the species’ habitat to ensure long term survival.

“Researchers have indicated the major threat to the lizard is restricted habitat, due to the spread of weeds and fire.

“With improved knowledge, rangers at Owen Springs can use weed control and prescribed burning to maintain habitat in a healthy state, and hopefully even increase the extent of suitable habitat, for the lizard.”

There is also a need to effectively control large feral herbivores such as horses and cattle and visitor activities within the Reserve.

Other locations are being surveyed throughout central Australia in an effort to find more populations.

Rangers at Finkle Gorge National Park and Ormiston Gorge (West MacDonnell National Park) are involved in this work.

The work on Slater’s Skink at Owen Springs is part of the implementation of the Recovery Plan for the species.

The recovery effort involves collaboration by NRETA with the Central Land Council, traditional owners and indigenous ranger groups, Flinders University and the South Australian Museum.

Media Note - For more information contact Chris Day on 8955 1119 or Chris Pavey on 8951 8249 .

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