

**Media Release:**

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## **New species of skinks discovered**

A new study has revealed the Northern Territory is a 'hotspot' for snake-eyed skinks (*Cryptoblepharus*), with nine new species discovered in the Territory alone.

Dr Paul Horner, Curator of Terrestrial Vertebrates at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT), said many of the new species are not only unique to the Territory, but also have very limited distributions, making them a significant conservation interest.

"Snake-eyed skinks are small, sun-loving lizards and are common and often abundant in parklands and suburban gardens," Dr Horner said.

"They are usually tree or rock-dwelling and are often observed off the ground on tree trunks, logs, fences and walls.

"Within Australia there were only six species previously recognised but my research found 23 species, with 13 of these completely new to science.

"In the Northern Territory there was thought to be four species, but only one of these is still considered part of the Territory fauna, overall the study revealed 13 species occur in the Territory, six of which are found nowhere else."

Dr Horner said some of the new species in the Territory include Swanson's snake-eyed skink (*Cryptoblepharus cygnatus*), commonly found in Darwin, the Arafura snake-eyed skink (*Cryptoblepharus gurrmul*), only found on islands off the Cobourg Peninsula and the Spangled snake-eyed skink (*Cryptoblepharus wulbu*) exclusive to Mount Borradaile in Arnhem Land.

"Part of the identification process involved genetic research which was carried out in collaboration with the South Australian Museum," Dr Horner said.

"This involved separating various proteins and enzymes to produce genetic 'markers', which is a particularly useful technique when determining genetic variation within and between populations.

"The major part of the identification process involved morphological research, determining the structure and configuration of each specimen by looking at external body scale arrangements as well as body and limb proportions.

"The bulk of the specimens examined were already preserved and obtained from museum collections however a considerable amount of fieldwork was involved in identifying the new species discovered.

Dr Horner's work is the result of more than ten years research, analysis and writing and was recently published in the MAGNT's scientific journal, *The Beagle*, which can be purchased from the MAGNT bookshop. Reference: "Systematics of the snake-eyed skink genus *Cryptoblepharus*." *The Beagle, Records of the Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory. Supplement 3. December 2007*

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**Media Note – for more information contact Dr Paul Horner on 8999 8248**

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