

Media Release:

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Tjuwanpa Rangers Assist Endangered Slater's Skink

Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) is collaborating with the Tjuwanpa Indigenous Ranger group at Hermannsburg, Central Australia as part of an ongoing project to protect the endangered Slater's skink.

Also known as a Floodplain skink, the Slater's skink is a brown medium sized lizard with a short snout and large head.

NRETAS' senior scientist Chris Pavey said the project at Hermannsburg commenced in late 2006 when surveys undertaken with the Tjuwanpa rangers revealed a new population along the Finke River.

"Our most recent field studies commenced earlier this month and are aimed at finding out the size and extent of the population, as initial assessments indicated that the Finke River area may be particularly significant for Slater's skink," Dr Pavey said.

"In addition to the survey considerable work will be undertaken to control buffel grass, an introduced pasture grass that causes degradation of the skink's habitat, and is considered the biggest threat to the lizard.

"Buffel grass was introduced into central Australia in the late 1960's which correlated with the decline and in some instances disappearance of Slater's skink at several sites.

"The rangers will be focussing on physically removing the grasses which are invading the habitat."

Dr Pavey said the Slater's skink was thought to be extinct until surveys by Biodiversity Conservation and the Alice Springs Desert Park (ASDP) in May 2004 located the species at four sites in the Alice Springs region.

"We've just commenced our fourth year of management and survey of the region and work to date emphasises that suitable habitat for the species remains limited with the total population estimated to be as little as 200 animals," Dr Pavey said.

"The decline of Slater's skink highlights concerns about the health and conservation of Desert Rivers and associated floodplains, which are cherished by many Territorians."

The arid and semi-arid regions of the Northern Territory are world-renowned for their high diversity of reptiles. Amongst this rich reptile fauna, Slater's skink is the only species which is considered endangered.

Key partners working with the Northern Territory Government in the recovery of the Slater's skink include the Central Land Council, Charles Darwin University and the South Australian Museum, with funding for the project with the Tjuwanpa Rangers provided by the Natural Resource Management Board (NT).

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Media Note – for more information contact Chris Pavey on 8951 8249.

Image – Slater's skink at Alice Springs Desert Park courtesy of Greg Fyfe

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