Biodiversity Conservation

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Conservation ecology of an endangered lizard, Slater's Skink

What is the Project About?

Slater's Skink (*Egernia slateri*), also know as the Floodplain Skink is found on the floodplains and adjacent foot-slopes of major drainages (Todd and Finke Rivers) in central Australia. This lizard was formally common in this area, but declined rapidly between the late 1960's and 1970's. It was feared to be extinct until populations were located at five sites in central Australia in 2004. The species is classified as endangered nationally. To safeguard this species from extinction it is essential to gain a better understanding of their current distribution and discover possible reasons for their decline.

Research

This is a co-operative project involving Biodiversity Conservation, Bioparks, Parks Management (all units of NRETA), the CLC, traditional owners and indigenous ranger groups as well as scientists from Flinders University and the South Australian Museum.

The specific objectives of the project are to:

- Locate remnant populations and assess population size and habitat of *Egernia slateri* in central Australia. Search effort in being concentrated in suitable floodplain habitat in the MacDonnell Ranges bioregion between Alice Springs and Hermannsburg.
- Study captive individuals to investigate the impact on behaviour and foraging success of threatening processes particularly invasion of habitat by exotic pasture grasses.
- Establish a captive breeding colony at the Alice Springs Desert Park and breed up numbers in captivity for release into the wild.
- Conduct experimental reintroductions into former sites of occurrence where potential threatening processes (predators, pasture grass, fire, introduced herbivores) are controlled. As part of this process develop effective methods for habitat restoration and enhancement. Potential habitat restoration/ enhancement methods include removal of exotic pasture grasses, exclusion of feral herbivores, control of numbers of native predators, and provision of artificial burrows.

Conservation of Slater's Skink habitat has benefits for other threatened and near threatened plant and animal species including the Desert Sand Skipper (*Croitana aestiva*), a butterfly endemic to the MacDonnell Ranges bioregion.

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