



Northern and Yorke Region Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard, *Tiliqua adelaidensis* Endangered



Conservation status

The Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard is classified as endangered under both the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999) and the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Act (1972).

Description

The Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard is a small brown skink about 10 cm long. The males are shorter and stockier than the females. The head of the Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard is quite large and has scales that make its head appear armoured. Surprisingly, these lizards do not have blue tongues, instead their tongues are rose pink in colour.

The top side of the Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard can be light grey brown, yellowish brown, orange tan or chocolate brown. The legs (especially the front legs) and tail may be lighter and more yellowish in colour. Although the lizards vary in colour most are scattered with darker spots and blotches.

Habitat requirements

Contrary to previous beliefs, Pygmy Bluetongue Lizards are not found in mallee country, but in native grasslands. These lizards make their homes in unused spider burrows (after first eating or evicting the spider that dug the burrow) and spend most of their time in or around their burrow.

Ecology

The lizards sit in, or near, their holes while waiting for prey, such as insects, to pass by. The presence of the lizards in a grassland is related to the structure of the grassland, rather than the type of grasses present. Grasslands with open spaces between tussocks are favoured, because the lizards can successfully hunt for insects. In contrast, grasslands with a thick layer of thatch are not suitable. Pygmy Bluetongue Lizards cannot exist in areas that have been ploughed.

This species is very wary and can sense danger from a long way off. At the first sign of danger they will scurry back down their holes.

Distribution

The Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard was first identified in 1863. However, the cryptic nature of the species meant that less than 20 specimens were collected between 1863 and 1959. Builders found live specimens in 1959, while taking apart an old shed at Marion. At the time, it was thought that Pygmy Bluetongue Lizards lived in mallee country and many unsuccessful searches were conducted. For many years this little lizard was thought to have been extinct.

Fortunately this was not the case and in 1992 a Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard was found dead in the stomach of a road-kill brown snake. This find prompted a search of surrounding areas and several small lizard colonies were found across the Mid North. To date, 22 populations of Pygmy Bluetongue Lizards have been found between Pt Wakefield and Peterborough.



Current known distribution of the Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard



Threatening processes

- Soil disturbance
- Small isolated populations
- Predation by cats and foxes
- Habitat destruction
- Over-grazing
- The use of herbicides and insecticides

Conservation and recovery

Projects that will aid the Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard, include:

- Measuring the area occupied by known populations.
- Searches for new populations of the species.
- Monitoring of known Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard populations.
- Further studies into the ecology of the lizard.

How you can help

If you have Pygmy Bluetongue Lizards on your property:

- Adopt or maintain a conservative grazing regime.
- Allow research of this species to occur on your property.
- Avoid earth disturbing activities in areas where there are Pygmy Bluetongue Lizards.

You can also:

- Search your property for populations of the species.
- Become involved in a local conservation group such as the Biodiversity and Endangered Species Team (BEST), phone (08) 8841-3402

For further information please contact

Department for Environment and Heritage
Unit 6, 17 Lennon Street, Clare, SA 5453
Phone: (08) 8841 3402 Fax: (08) 8841 3411
Email: n&y_bio_team@saugov.sa.gov.au

www.environment.sa.gov.au/biodiversity/bcp/index.html



