Threatened species of the Northern Territory

Oenpelli python

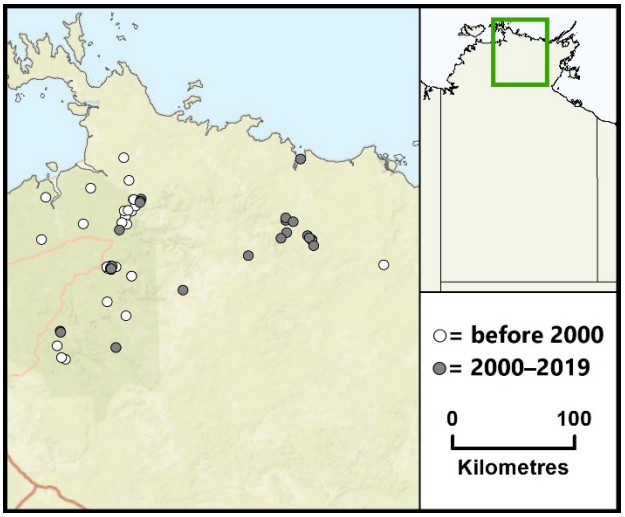
Simalia oenpelliensis

Conservation status

Australia: Not listed
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Northern Territory: Vulnerable
Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976

Credit: : C. Jolly



Caption: Known localities of the Oenpelli Python in the NT (nrmaps.nt.gov.au)

Description

The Oenpelli Python is a very large dark olive-brown snake, measuring 2.5 m long on average and patterned with darker blotches. The underside is cream to dull yellow.

Distribution

The Oenpelli Python is restricted to the sandstone massif of Western Arnhem Land. Within this area, it has been reported from the upper catchments of the Cadell, South Alligator and East Alligator River systems.

NT conservation reserves where reported: Kakadu National Park.

Ecology and life-history

The Oenpelli Python occurs in monsoon rainforest patches, riparian areas, woodlands, open heathlands and bare rock pavements[1]. It is known to shelter in cracks, caves and crevices of rugged broken sandstone escarpments and gorges, or in large shady trees. Its diet comprises mostly medium to large mammals, particularly possums and macropods.

Threatening processes

The Oenpelli Python is sought by some illicit herpetological collectors. This impact is probably minor and localised, as much of the range is almost inaccessible.

More pervasively, fire regimes across its range have changed over the last 50 or so years, to now include a far higher incidence of extensive hot, late Dry season fires[2]. It is possible that this may increase direct mortality, but, more likely, the resulting vegetation change may reduce habitat

suitability either directly for this species or indirectly for its prey species.

Conservation objectives and management

There is currently no management program in place for the Oenpelli Python in the NT.

Research priorities are to: examine the impacts of fire regimes upon the Oenpelli Python and/or its preferred prey species; attempt to estimate relative abundance and/or total population size; investigate habitat requirements; and collate, where appropriate, indigenous ecological knowledge of the species held by Aboriginal landowners in the stone country.

Management priorities are to: establish a monitoring program for this species, particularly with reference to its response to fire management; and continue to deter illicit reptile collectors.

References

[1] Gillespie, G.R., Fukuda, Y., McDonald, P., 2020. Using non-systematically collected data to evaluate the conservation status of elusive species: a case study on Australia's Oenpelli python. Wildl. Res. 47, 146–157.

[2] Russell-Smith, J., Ryan, P.G., Klessa, D., Waight, G., Harwood, R., 1998. Fire regimes, fire-sensitive vegetation and fire management of the sandstone Arnhem Plateau, monsoonal northern Australia. J. Appl. Ecol. 35, 829–846.