

Threatened species of the Northern Territory

Crack-dwelling ctenotus (Keep-Ord Rivers)

Ctenotus rimacola camptris

Conservation status

Australia: Not listed

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Northern Territory: Vulnerable

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976

Description

The Crack-dwelling Ctenotus (Keep-Ord Rivers) is a moderately large and robust skink, with a snout-vent length of about 94 mm. It has prominent broad dark vertebral and laterodorsal stripes. Two subspecies are recognised: *Ctenotus rimacola rimacola*, which has a grey ground colour, and *C. r. camptris*, which has an olive-brown ground colour, a narrower vertebral stripe and mottled hindlimbs.

The Crack-dwelling Ctenotus is most similar to the Black-soil Ctenotus *C. joanae* from the Barkly Tablelands and the more widespread Robust Ctenotus *C. robustus*, but is distinguished from these species by a combination of size and scale characteristics¹.

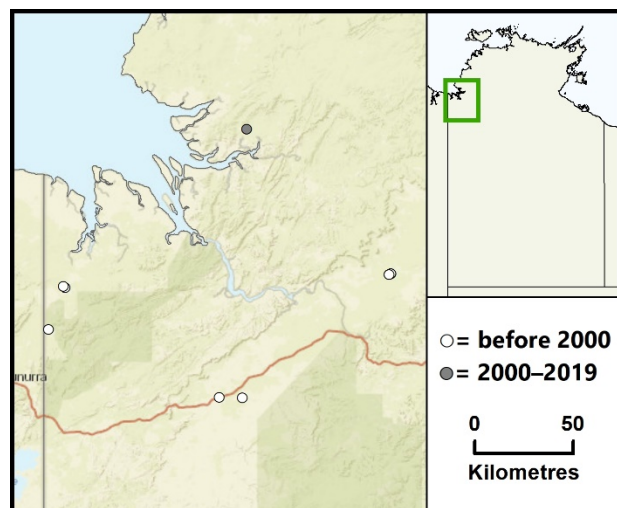
Distribution

The Crack-dwelling Ctenotus (Keep-Ord Rivers) has a narrow geographic range, restricted to the floodplains of the lower Ord and Keep Rivers in north-western Northern Territory (NT) and adjacent far north-eastern Kimberley in Western Australia. The other subspecies, *C. r. rimacola*, is restricted to the Victoria River District.



Credit: A. Holmes

NT conservation reserves where reported: None.



Caption: Known localities of the Crack-dwelling Ctenotus (Keep-Ord Rivers) in the NT (nrmmaps.nt.gov.au)

Ecology and life-history

The Crack-dwelling Ctenotus (Keep-Ord Rivers) is restricted to grasslands, including those with a sparse woodland overstorey, on cracking clay soils. It forages on the ground and shelters within soil cracks. Its diet comprises a range of invertebrates.

Threatening processes

The most significant threat to the Crack-dwelling *Ctenotus* (Keep-Ord Rivers) is potential broad-scale clearing associated with conversion of native grassland to horticulture in the lower Ord and Keep River systems.

The species is also subject to a pervasive threat from grazing by livestock and feral herbivores. Grazing likely has a negative impact on the Crack-dwelling *Ctenotus* (Keep-Ord Rivers) habitat through decreasing vegetation cover and altering the composition of the ground layer.

Long-term changes in vegetation structure and composition, particularly invasion of grasslands by woody species (such as rosewood *Terminalia volucris*), resulting from altered fire regimes, livestock management and global warming, may reduce the area of suitable habitat. Predation by feral Cats *Felis catus* may also be a threat.

Conservation objectives and management

The primary research priority for the Crack-dwelling *Ctenotus* (Keep-Ord Rivers) is to examine the impacts of possible intensification of pastoral management.

Conservation management for the subspecies should focus on maintaining adequate areas of suitable habitat under all scenarios of increased horticultural use of the lower Ord and Keep River valleys.

References

¹ Horner, P., Fisher, A., 1998. *Ctenotus rimacola* sp. nov. (Scincidae), a new species of lizard with two allopatric subspecies, from the Ord-Victoria region of north-western Australia. *Rec. West. Aust. Mus.* 19, 187–200.

² Fisher, A., 2001. Biogeography and conservation of Mitchell grasslands in northern Australia. PhD thesis. Northern Territory University, Darwin.

³ Kinhill Pty. Ltd., 2000. Ord River Irrigation Area Stage 2. Proposed development of the M2 area. Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Kinhill, Perth.