

Range extension for the Black-headed Worm-lizard, *Aprasia picturata* (Squamata: Pygopodidae)

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Manuscript received August 2007; accepted February 2008

Abstract. The third capture of an *Aprasia picturata* increases its recorded geographical distribution in a northerly direction by approximately 250 km. This record may represent a new population or a range extension. If this record indicates a small disjunct population, and the species is already relatively rare, then there may be a case for affording it and its habitat special protection.

Key words: *Aprasia picturata*, geographic range, Western Australia

Introduction

The habitat of the Black-headed Worm-lizard, *Aprasia picturata*, was described by Wilson & Swan (2005) as 'rocky ridges vegetated with low acacias and eremophilas near Leonora, in the southern interior of Western Australia' (pp 106).

Aprasia picturata is only known from two specimens collected at Minara Station near Leonora. Nothing is known of its ecology (Thompson & Thompson 2006).

We report here the capture of an additional specimen approximately 30 km south of Wiluna, Western Australia. This represents a range extension of approximately 250km in a northerly direction

Observations

On 16th January 2007, we captured an individual *A. picturata* at location (WGS 84) 51 243140E, 7020828N in a funnel trap as part of an environmental impact assessment for a proposed mining project in the region. The habitat comprised of a low, dense spinifex (*Triodia* sp.) grassland with occasional mixed *Acacia* shrubs. The specimen was lodged with the Western Australian Museum (R166877) and identified by B. Maryan.

Discussion

Only two specimens of *Aprasia picturata* had been recorded in northern Goldfields of Western Australia. Figure 1 indicates the recorded locations of the two specimens in the Western Australian museum collection and the extension to its published distribution represented by this specimen. This may indicate that it is

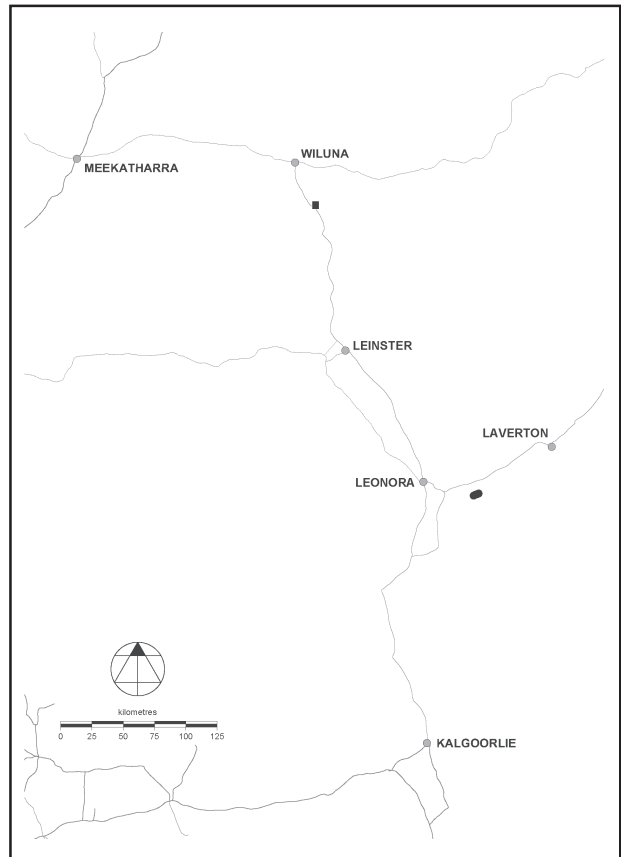


Figure 1. Location of three specimens of *A. picturata*.

rare or there have been few fauna surveys in its habitat. Given the mining 'boom' in Western Australia and the number of fauna surveys (~15) that have recently been conducted in the region (ATA Environmental 2007; Biota 2006 and references therein) it is surprising that the species has not been recorded more often, if it is abundant. The available data would suggest that it has a restricted geographic distribution and is also rare.

The lack of records for this species makes it difficult to comment on its preferred habitat. Wilson & Swan (2005) described *A. picturata* habitat as being associated with rocky ridges vegetated with low Acacias and Eremophilas, however, the individual reported here was captured on a spinifex sand plain. It is presumed that *A. picturata* is similar to other Australian *Aprasia*, being fossorial and living 'beneath embedded stumps, in insect holes and under rocks and logs' (Wilson & Swan 2005).

It is not unusual to find isolated populations of reptiles outside their published geographical distribution (e.g. Thompson *et al.* 2005; Menz & Cullen 2006). However, this record represents a significant extension to the published distribution (Wilson & Swan 2005; Thompson & Thompson 2006). If we adopted the precautionary principle, then there may be a *prima facie* case for affording a level of special protection to this species until more information is available on its geographic distribution, population size and ecology. If there are only a few localities that support these disjunct populations of *A. picturata*, then appropriate habitat protection strategies should be put in place.

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank Paul Doughty and Brad Maryan from the Western Australian Museum for access to the specimen database, and Cale Alexander, Carl Gosper and Edward Swinhoe for assistance with the field work.

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