

Corangamite Water Skink

Eulamprus tympanum marnieae

A Nationally Threatened Species of the Basalt Plains Grassland Community

Description

The Corangamite Water Skink (*Eulamprus tympanum marnieae*) is a medium-sized lizard of the family Scincidae. Adults may reach 100 mm snout-vent length, with a tail length of up to 150 mm and a body mass of up to 25 grams. The lizard's dorsal surface is pale olive to dark yellowish brown, overlain by black markings. The general colour is suffused with yellow; often the underside is bright yellow. The Southern Water Skink (*Eulamprus tympanum tympanum*) is closely related, but has different colour and scale patterns.

The Corangamite Water Skink produces one litter of 1-6 live young each year, in late December. Larger females have more, and larger, young.

Distribution and habitat

The Corangamite Water Skink was discovered in 1963 near Lismore, Victoria, and described in 1995. It has been found at 31 sites, which represents at least eleven discrete populations. It is endemic to the basalt plains of south-western Victoria and restricted to sites between Colac in the south-east and Lake Bolac in the north-west.



Distribution of the
Corangamite
Water Skink

The subspecies is a habitat specialist inhabiting localities that combine deeply fissured basaltic rock piles, remnant shrubs and permanent or ephemeral wetlands. About 90% of populations are on private land, which is generally used for agriculture. Most surrounding habitat has been extensively modified.

The Corangamite Water Skink is predominantly insectivorous; feeding on terrestrial prey such as spiders, beetles and ants, as well as aquatic prey including mayfly and dragonfly larva. It also consumes the fruit of the Volcanic Plain Tree Violet (*Melicytus sp. aff. dentata*), and may play an important role in the dispersal and germination of its seeds. Unlike other water skinks, the Corangamite Water Skink is extremely shy and will often take cover when a human is tens of metres away. It takes refuge in deep gaps and fissures in rock piles.

Conservation status

The Corangamite Water Skink is listed nationally as 'Endangered' under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, 'Threatened' under the *Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, and is classified as 'Critically Endangered' in Victoria. A National Recovery Plan has been prepared, and is being implemented.



Corangamite Water Skink (*Eulamprus tympanum marnieae*)

Decline and threats

The Corangamite Water Skink has declined; disappearing from Lismore and the north-eastern shore of Lake Bolac. Populations are extremely fragmented and many are very small. Recent sightings of this subspecies have generally been from private land used for grazing of stock.

Threats to these sites include: further clearing of vegetation and rocks for agriculture, the removal of boulders and demolition of dry-stone walls for landscape gardening, changed grazing regimes, weed invasion, changed fire regimes, changed hydrology and/or water quality, use of agricultural chemicals, and the impacts of introduced animals (foxes, cats, rabbits, mice, sheep, cattle) either by predation or grazing.

Combinations of these threats may also be important. For example, cat predation may be more of a problem in small populations close to urban developments. Drought and climate change may also have a devastating impact on this semi-aquatic lizard by altering its wetland habitat.

Conservation

Recovery of the Corangamite Water Skink depends on the co-operation and involvement of landholders. Recovery is funded by the Australian Federal Government via the Corangamite and Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authorities, and implemented in conjunction with organisations such as Greening Australia's Borrella-kandelop project, Lismore Land Protection Group, Trust for Nature, Parks Victoria, Department of Primary Industries, Colac Otway Shire, Watershed 2000, International Student Volunteers, Alive Tree Planters and local schools.

Volunteers planting habitat species



Creation of rock habitat: Corangamite Water Skinks colonised the area rapidly

Approximately 24 km of fencing has been erected to protect and enhance the habitat of the skink across 18 sites. At all sites the fencing was undertaken with the full agreement, support and enthusiasm of the land owner/manager, and at no or minimal costs to them.

The skink's protection on private property generally results in no net loss in agricultural productivity, since its habitat is rocky areas on the margins of wetlands. Restoration of habitat can take a long time as the Tree Violet and other vegetation the skink prefers are slow growing.

The skink is now protected in three Crown land Lake Reserves. A Nature Conservation Reserve and two private properties were also purchased specifically for the conservation of the skink.



Dreeite Nature Conservation Reserve: purchased for the protection of the Skink and other threatened species

For more information on this threatened species and the recovery program, please contact:

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For more information on this and other threatened species look at: www.swifft.net.au

Skink photographs by Peter Robertson Wildlife Profiles P/L. All other photographs by Garry Peterson

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