



mallee

lizards

field guide





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www.malleecma.vic.gov.au

The Mallee Catchment Management Authority's primary responsibility is to ensure that natural resources in the region are managed in an integrated and ecologically sustainable way.

The Authority works with the community and delivery partners to maintain and improve the health of natural habitats, flora and fauna in the Victorian Mallee. This is achieved by a wide range of management activities such as pest control, track rationalisation, revegetation works and by offering landowner incentives for similar activities.

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mallee
catchment management authority

About the Mallee Catchment Management Authority

The Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA) region encompasses the Victorian Murray River floodplain from the South Australian border to Nyah, and the arid mallee country south to the Wimmera (see map, inside cover).

Why a field guide for lizards?

This field guide includes lizards that are known to occur in the Mallee region. It contains information based on local knowledge and experience to help you identify a lizard. It is intended to be simple and straightforward to use and light enough to carry in your pocket.

This field guide is part of a series developed by the Mallee CMA to showcase different groups of fauna within the Mallee region. This series includes field guides for Mallee waterbirds and Mallee frogs.

What are lizards?

Lizards are scaled reptiles (Class Reptilia – Order Squamata). They typically have feet, external ears and colour vision. The length of a lizard is usually measured from its snout (nose) to the base of its tail (vent). This is because many lizards have the ability to lose their tails and survive. In this field guide lizard length is thus referred to as SVL (snout to vent length).

Reproduction

Typically lizards are oviparous, that is they reproduce by laying eggs into nests. Some species however, have other ways of reproducing.

Ovoviviparous: eggs are held inside the mother's body until they are almost ready to hatch. The developing embryos are nourished by the egg yolk.

Viviparous: the embryos develop within the mother's body, who gives birth to live young. Embryos may be partly nourished via the mother's placenta.

Parthenogenesis: asexual reproduction (without the need of a male lizard).

Lizards of the Mallee

More lizard species are found in the Mallee than anywhere else in Victoria. These can be grouped into five types: geckos, legless lizards, skinks, dragons and monitor lizards/goannas.

Geckos (Families Gekkonidae, Diplodactylidae and Carphodactylidae)

Geckos are small, soft, nocturnal lizards with large unblinking eyes. As they do not have eyelids they use their tongue to lick their eyeballs clean. Some geckos can run along walls and ceilings using microscopic hair-like projections on their fingertips to grip surfaces. Most geckos can discard their tails if threatened and regrow them. All species lay eggs, usually two per clutch.

Legless lizards (Family Pygopodidae)

Legless lizards are endemic to Australia and New Guinea, meaning they are not found anywhere else in the world. Also known as 'flap-footed lizards' or 'worm lizards', legless lizards appear to be limbless. They do, however, have hind limbs in the form of small scaly flaps. Like geckos, legless lizards usually lay two eggs per clutch.

Legless lizards are often mistaken for snakes and killed; however, there are some important differences between the two. Legless lizards have a thick fleshy tongue rather than a slender, forked tongue. Some have obvious ear-openings which are not present on snakes. The tail of a legless lizard is greater than 50 percent of its body length (whereas a snake's tail is much less than 50 percent of its body length). Legless lizards are not venomous.

Skinks (Family Scincidae)

Skinks are the most abundant and diverse family of all the Australian vertebrates (animals with backbones). They typically have four limbs, each with five fingers and toes (although some species have reduced limbs or toes), shiny overlapping body scales and eyelids. Some may have tails that can be discarded as a defence mechanism, and then regrown. They may lay eggs or give birth to live young.

Dragons (Family Agamidae)

Dragons are medium sized lizards with small, non-glossy scales. Their limbs are well-developed, their digits have strong claws and their tongue is broad and fleshy.

Dragons in the Mallee do not have the ability to discard their tails as a defence mechanism, but may have a limited ability to repair their tail if it is damaged. All dragons reproduce by laying eggs.

Monitor lizards/Goannas (Family Varanidae)

The term 'monitor' is used worldwide, while the term 'goanna' is strictly Australian. They refer to the same family of lizard. This guide will use the term 'goanna'.

Goannas are large lizards with powerful tails, strong claws and long, sharp teeth. They have a slender, forked tongue which they use to investigate crevices for prey. They are carnivorous, consuming almost anything, including dead animals.

Male goannas will fight each other during the mating season. Female goannas lay eggs.

Habitats of lizards in the Mallee

Lizards in the Mallee occupy a wide range of habitats, from semi-arid to wetter environments close to waterways. Some lizards dig their own burrows for shelter, others shelter in soil cracks, logs and branches, tree bark, rock crevices, vegetation such as spinifex or abandoned spider burrows. Many depend upon the specialised habitat in which they live; others are more adaptable and can live almost anywhere, including farming and urban environments.

Mallee woodlands and shrublands

Mallee woodlands and shrublands are the dominant vegetation communities in the Mallee region. They are characterised by the mallee tree, a type of eucalypt that has several slender trunks arising from a single large underground tuber called a 'mallee root'. These woodland/shrubland habitats have lots of open space between the trees and shrubs, with an understorey of shrubs, grasses and herbs.



Heathlands

Heathlands occur on nutrient-poor, coarse, silicon-rich sand in the Big Desert. They may lack mallee eucalypts, and are instead dominated by banksia, tea-tree, she-oak, hakea and myrtle species. The understorey is often dense low shrubs, sedges and grasses.



Photo: Parks Victoria

Riparian forests, woodlands and shrublands

Riparian forests, woodlands and shrublands occur along rivers, floodplains, wetlands and creeks. They are dominated by either River Red Gum (forests), Black Box (woodlands) or Tangled Lignum (shrublands). Floodwater is needed to stimulate the regeneration of these forests, woodlands and shrublands.



Semi-arid non-eucalypt woodlands

Semi-arid non-eucalypt woodlands are dominated by Slender Cypress-pine, White Cypress-pine, Buloke, Belah or Sugarwood. Tall shrubs such as Slender Hop-bush, Umbrella Wattle, Sweet Quandong and Cattle Bush grow between the trees while native herbs and spear grasses cover the ground layer.

Within these types of woodlands, Buloke woodlands are particularly important as they are listed as 'endangered' under the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Once widespread, Buloke woodlands are now fragmented and highly degraded.



Chenopod shrublands and plains grasslands

These vegetation communities are devoid of trees. They are instead dominated by shrubs such as Saltbush and Bluebush (chenopod shrublands) or tussock grasses and perennial herbs (plains grasslands).



Conservation status of lizards

Of the Mallee lizards, the Beaked Gecko, Mallee Worm-lizard, Samphire Skink, Dwarf Burrowing Skink, Heath Skink, Millewa Skink, Hooded Scaly-foot, Lined Earless Dragon and Rosenberg's Goanna are all threatened and under the Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act).

The *Advisory List of Threatened Vertebrate Fauna in Victoria 2013* has also raised conservation concern for the following species:

- 'critically endangered' - Beaked Gecko, Heath Skink, Hooded Scaly-foot, Lined Earless Dragon, Millewa Skink and Saltbush Striped Skink;
- 'endangered' - Dwarf Burrowing Skink, Rosenberg's Goanna, Lace Monitor and Samphire Skink; and
- 'vulnerable' - Mallee Worm-lizard.

Threats to lizards

Habitat depletion

The Mallee landscape has been extensively cleared of native vegetation. Worst affected are the vegetation communities that grow on more fertile land and/or which contain species that were used for timber harvesting. Approximately 53 percent of vegetation in the Mallee region has been cleared for agriculture, urban development, timber and mining.

As a result of this clearing, a number of vegetation communities are now quite severely depleted, fragmented or degraded. These include Buloke woodlands, Belah woodlands, woorinen mallee, ridged plains mallee, parilla mallee and plains savannah.

Habitat degradation

Rabbits can degrade lizard habitat by intensively grazing the grasses that provide lizards with shelter and protection. Cattle, feral pigs and goats can trample lizard burrows and cause soil compaction and erosion. Burrow disturbance and destruction can also occur as a result of motorbikes and four wheel drives driving off track. Collection of firewood from bushland and the introduction of noxious weeds can also reduce habitat opportunities for some lizards.

Predation

Introduced predators such as feral cats, pigs and foxes can put pressure on lizard populations.

Changed fire regimes

Fires are a dominant part of the Mallee landscape and are a major factor in determining the nature and distribution of vegetation. Fire regimes have changed since European settlement with alterations to fire frequency, intensity, timing and extent.

As with other Mallee wildlife, lizard response to fire often depends on the changes to vegetation structure (which provides them with food, shelter and breeding grounds). Leaf litter, spinifex cover and tree bark are all affected by fire, and all recover in differing timeframes. This variability is important for providing a variety of lizard habitat types, and thus lizard diversity.

What can you do you help?

The Mallee CMA encourages land owners and all community members to help protect Mallee lizards by:

- Controlling pest plants to prevent weed invasion into known habitat;
- Controlling pest animals such as foxes, feral cats and rabbits;
- Minimising soil disturbance by staying on existing tracks and roads;
- Reducing the impact of grazing by fencing off patches of remnant vegetation;
- Retaining fallen branches, leaf litter and twigs in natural environments;
- Reducing the use of insecticides and pesticides in sensitive areas; and
- Minimising the risk of fire escaping onto public land.

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Marbled Gecko

Christinus marmoratus



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body grey or pinkish-brown with dark lines in marbled, netted or zigzag patterns. Pattern on tail is similar, with irregular orange-brown blotches often present. SVL: 55 mm.

Where you'll see them

In Red Gum areas and throughout the southern Mallee in many varied habitats including heathlands, woodlands and disturbed land. Often found under tree bark, in leaf litter and under rocks, logs and rubbish.

Breeding

Commonly found in groups with one male among up to 10 females. They often use a communal nest in which females will lay two eggs each.

Feeding

Marbled Geckos feed on a wide range of invertebrates including spiders and crickets.

Quirky fact

Can 'drop', or discard, their tail when threatened to confuse their predator and aid in escape. It takes eight months for the tail to regenerate, although this can depend on food availability.

Beaded Gecko

Lucasium damaeum



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

Body pinkish-brown with a pale zigzag stripe with darker edges along the back. Belly is white. SVL: 55 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee Region, preferring sandy soils with spinifex, but also found in mallee woodlands. They shelter in burrows that they make themselves or are abandoned from other lizards and spiders.

Breeding

Females lay two eggs, with young emerging in late February.

Feeding

Feeds on small invertebrates such as spiders, cockroaches and crickets.

Interesting fact

Males are territorial; they bite, wave their tail and 'cry out' to defend their ground.

Wood Gecko

Diplodactylus vittatus



Photo Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Description

Body grey or brown with a pale zigzagging stripe along back and extending forward onto head. The tail is short and thick with a series of pale blotches. SVL: 50 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee Region in open shrublands and woodlands. Not located along Murray River floodplains. They are nocturnal, retreating in burrows during the day and coming out at night.

Breeding

Will share a communal nest site with up to 10 females, with each female laying two eggs.

Feeding

Feeds on small invertebrates such as spiders, crickets and cockroaches.

Quirky fact

When threatened, this gecko will open its mouth and raise body high off the ground.

Tree Dtella

Gehyra variegata



Photo Marcia Riederer

Description

Body various shades of grey to brown with dark bars separating pale blotches. The side of the head has two or three darker lines from the snout to the neck. All digits except the inner one of each foot are clawed. SVL: 54 mm.

Where you'll see them

Within woodlands and shrublands of the northern Mallee, including Sunset Country and Hattah-Kulkyne National Park. An arboreal species (tree dwelling), the Tree Dtella depends on heat exchange with the bark to maintain its body temperature.

Breeding

Males are territorial, living with several females. Females share a communal nest and lay one egg with a gestation of two months. Tree Dtellas live for five years, maturing at three years.

Feeding

Feeds on invertebrates such as beetles, spiders and termites.

Quirky fact

Emits a shrill squeak when threatened.

Bynoe's Gecko

Heteronotia binoei



Photo Marcia Riederer

Description

Slender and long-tailed, this gecko varies in body colour from yellow-brown, red-brown to grey-brown, with scattered dark and pale spots or bands. Each digit is clawed. SVL: 54 mm.

Where you'll see them

In the Mallee region they are found within and north of Murray-Sunset National Park. Uses almost any sort of ground cover such as logs, termite mounds and rubbish for shelter.

Breeding

Females lay two eggs during the summer in nests made under rocks or inside logs and burrows.

Feeding

Feeds on invertebrates such as insects, spiders and scorpions.

Distinguishing fact

Also known as the Prickly Gecko due to its spine-like scales.

Beaked Gecko

Rhynchoedura spp.

Threatened
(FFG Act)
Critically Endangered
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Slender body is pink-brown in colour, with light and dark blotches. Tail is broad. Snout is 'beak-like' and eyes are rimmed in white. SVL: 54 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in Belah woodland, chenopod shrubland or Black Box woodland. Widespread in Australia, however is limited to a few locations in the northern Mallee. The Beaked Gecko shelters in disused spider holes, staying within 30 metres of entrance at all times.

Breeding

Female lays two leathery eggs.

Feeding

Forages on the ground between vegetation, particularly likes to feed on termites.

Interesting fact

Females are larger than the males and mature earlier at one year old.

Southern Spiny-tailed Gecko

Strophurus intermedius



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

Body colour grey with darker speckles forming zigzagging lines from head to tail. Short cone-shaped spines are arranged in two rows down the body and in rings on tail. The eyes are rimmed with bright orange. SVL: 64 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in mallee woodlands and shrublands. Recorded living in trees where they shelter under tree bark, and in spinifex.

Breeding

Females mature at two years and lay two eggs during the summer. Eggs take around 45 days to hatch.

Feeding

Feeds on insects and spiders.

Quirky fact

Can squirt an irritant fluid from their tails to deter predators such as birds.

Thick-tailed Gecko

Underwoodisaurus milii



Photo Marcia Riederer

Description

Large gecko with a thick carrot-shaped tail. Body colour variable from pink to dark purplish brown, with many white or yellow spots. SVL: 96 mm.

Where you'll see them

Widespread in the Mallee, in woodlands and chenopod shrublands, they shelter in self-excavated burrows or in rabbit warrens.

Breeding

Females lay two eggs in summer, sometimes in a communal nest.

Feeding

Feeds on a variety of invertebrates as well as other small lizards. They lick their eyes after eating to keep clean.

Quirky fact

When threatened, they lunge at their predator and create a loud 'barking' defensive call, which gives them their alternate common name 'Barking Gecko'.

Tessellated Gecko

Diplodactylus tessellatus



Photo Marcia Riederer

Description

A robust gecko with a short, broad tail. Body colour pale grey, with a variable pattern of darker mottling. Darker blotches are usually present on belly. SVL: 50 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found along the Murray River floodplain, it shelters in hollow fallen branches, soil cracks and insect or spider holes.

Breeding

Females lay soft, parchment-shelled eggs.

Feeding

Feeds on arthropods such as insects, spiders and scorpions.

Quirky fact

Tessellated Geckos have slightly enlarged, padded toes.

Mallee Worm-lizard

Aprasia aurita

Threatened
(FFG Act)
Vulnerable
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body colour pale brown, with sides flushed with grey and tail flushed with pink. Each scale marked with a dark slash creating lines along the length of the lizard, especially on the tail. SVL: 110 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in the sandy soils of mallee woodlands and spinifex. Limited distribution in the eastern and northern Big Desert. Shelters underground, often in ant galleries. Once found in areas now used for agriculture.

Breeding

Females lay two eggs.

Feeding

Feeds mainly on ant larvae and pupae.

Interesting fact

The Mallee Worm-lizard is the only worm-lizard of 12 in Australia that has an ear opening, however this opening is almost completely covered by a scale.

Pink-nosed Worm-lizard

Aprasia inaurita



Photo Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Description

Also known as the 'Red-tailed Worm-lizard', body colour is pale yellowish brown or greyish brown, with bright orange on the tip of tail and a snout flushed with pink or orange. SVL: 136 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in semi-arid mallee woodlands on sandy soils. In the Mallee region, they are not found north of Murray-Sunset and Hattah-Kulkyne National Parks. They shelter underground and are active during the day.

Breeding

Females lays two eggs in spring.

Feeding

Feeds predominantly on ant eggs.

Quirky fact

Will raise brightly coloured tail when threatened.

Southern Legless Lizard

Delma australis



Photo Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Description

Body colour is greyish brown. Head black on top with black stripes down the side of head and neck. Tail is two and a half times the length of the body. SVL: 88 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee region. Found in mallee woodlands sheltered in dense low vegetation such as spinifex and tussock grass, as well as in leaf litter.

Breeding

Females lay two eggs in early summer, which hatch in 70 days.

Feeding

Diet consists of invertebrates including spiders and cockroaches.

Quirky fact

When threatened, legless lizards thrust their body forward while making squeaking noises.

Butler's Legless Lizard

Delma butleri



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

Body dark brown in colour. Belly is known to change colour between white and yellow. SVL: 96 mm.

Where you'll see them

The Butler's Legless Lizard is endemic to the Mallee, meaning it does not live anywhere else. Found scattered throughout mallee woodlands where it shelters exclusively in spinifex. It does not live north of Murray-Sunset and Hattah-Kulkyne National Parks.

Breeding

Females breed in spring, with eggs recorded over summer

Feeding

Eats a variety of insects.

Interesting fact

Legless lizards have well-developed hind-limb flaps, evidence of the historical presence of legs.

Olive Legless Lizard

Delma inornata



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

A slender legless lizard with a tail up to four times the length of its body. Body colour medium olive-brown, usually with darker edged scales. SVL: 133 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in grasslands and grassy woodlands.

Breeding

Females lay eggs.

Feeding

Feed on small invertebrates, mainly insects.

Fascinating fact

Within grasses, the Olive Legless Lizard moves very easily, gracefully weaving without touching the ground. On open ground they move with a series of wiggling leaps.

Burton's Snake-lizard

Lialis burtonis



Photo Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Description

Body colour and pattern varies considerably, from plain light grey to brown and grey stripes or lines of spots. Pointed snout and a vertical black line in the pupils. SVL: 290 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered across the Mallee in varied habitat including mallee woodlands, heathlands and grasslands.

Breeding

Nest is a scrape in the ground, sometimes containing a few sticks or twigs.

Feeding

Communal living and nests have been documented.

Fascinating fact

This legless-lizard will grip its prey until suffocated, then swallow it head-first. The head is uniquely hinged to enable this action.

Common Scaly-foot

Pygopus lepidopodus



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

Body either plain grey or elaborately patterned with three rows of alternating dashes in orange and black and checker-patterned sides. SVL: 274 mm

Where you'll see them

Scattered across the Mallee in varied habitat including mallee woodlands and heathlands. Shelter in low vegetation such as spinifex.

Breeding

Females are heavier than males and lay two eggs from October to December, sometimes in a communal nest. Eggs hatch after 70 days.

Feeding

Feed on spiders (which they prey upon within their burrows) and other invertebrates.

Quirky fact

When threatened, the Common Scaly-foot flashes its thick fleshy tongue.

Hooded Scaly-foot

Pygopus schraderi

Threatened
(FFG Act)
Critically Endangered
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

A large legless lizard with a dark head, rounded snout and prominent ear openings. Looks similar to a snake, however the Hooded Scaly-foot has a broad, flat tongue. Females grow larger than males. SVL: 198 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in open vegetation communities on heavy soils, such as chenopod scrublands and grasslands, where it shelters in soil cracks and invertebrate burrows. It is most active during the night (nocturnal), and is thought to become inactive during the winter. In the Mallee region, populations are extremely limited. Has been spotted in the north of the region.

Breeding

Females lay a clutch of two eggs once a year, during summer.

Feeding

Feed on arthropods, including spiders and scorpions.

Quirky fact

When threatened, they rear and flick their fleshy tongues to mimic venomous snakes. Will utter a long wheezing squeak if grasped, and will readily discard their tails.

Ragged Snake-eyed Skink

Cryptoblepharus pannosus



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body grey-brown in colour with a pale line extending from each eye to the base of the tail. Light and dark flecks scattered all over body and tail. SVL: 40 mm.

Where you'll see them

In the Mallee region, populations are scattered around the north and east borders. Mostly an arboreal skink (living in trees), it is also found in fallen logs and old wooden fences, human structures and rocks.

Breeding

Females lay two eggs.

Feeding

Feeds on invertebrates including spiders.

Quirky fact

This skink loves vertical faces of rocks, trees, buildings and fences. They are happy to forage on these exposed surfaces.

Murray Striped Skink

Ctenotus brachyonyx



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body brown to grey with a well-defined black stripe along length of back ending abruptly at the base of the broad tail. Head and limbs have no pattern. SVL: 83 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered across the mid and lower Mallee region, found in semi-arid, sandy areas with mallee woodlands and spinifex.

Breeding

Females lay eggs.

Feeding

Feeds upon a variety of invertebrates.

Interesting fact

The *Ctenotus* genus is the largest reptile genus in Australia, with 102 species.

Eyrean Striped Skink

Ctenotus taeniatus



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Light coloured body with five black lines down the back. Sides of the body are black with pale patches. SVL: 50 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in mallee woodlands with spinifex grass and sandy soils. They dig burrows under vegetation. Populations within the Mallee region are mostly located in the Big Desert Wilderness Park, Wyperfeld National Park and Hattah-Kulkyne National Park.

Breeding

Females lay one to three eggs in summer.

Feeding

Feeds on insect pupae and eggs, spiders, beetles and bugs.

Saltbush Striped Skink

Ctenotus olympicus

Critically Endangered
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body has light and dark brown stripes along length of back, Sides are dark brown with cream spots. A thin cream stripe extends from just above the eye to the base of the tail. Tail is light brown on top with darker mottling on the sides. Fourth digits on the hind limbs are particularly long. SVL: 69 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in shrublands with heavy soils. In the Mallee region, it is found at Ned's Corner on the northern floodplain.

Breeding

Females lay eggs.

Feeding

Feeds on invertebrates.

Interesting fact

The Saltbush Striped Skink was only discovered in Victoria in 1986.

Eastern Striped Skink

Ctenotus orientalis



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body pale grey with a pattern of stripes and spots in black or dark-brown. Pattern on sides becomes more pale. Tail red-brown in colour. SVL: 82 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee region in low open shrubland, and on more compact sand or soil. Shelters in burrows below vegetation.

Breeding

Females lay eggs in late spring.

Feeding

Feeds on insects, centipedes, spiders and a little vegetation.

Helpful fact

May be difficult to distinguish from the Saltbush Striped Skink.

Regal Striped Skink

Ctenotus regius



Photo Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Description

Body has a complex pattern of stripes and spots, in pale, dark-brown and red-brown colours. Has a prominent white stripe down forearms. SVL: 73 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the northern Mallee region, on sandy red soils supporting open woodlands, shrublands with spinifex, or chenopod shrublands. Shelters in burrows found under vegetation.

Breeding

Females lay two to four eggs in spring.

Feeding

Actively forages around ground vegetation, feeding on insects, centipedes, spiders, leaves and berries.

Interesting fact

Hybrids with the Saltbush Striped Skink have been recorded.

Large Striped Skink

Ctenotus robustus



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

A large skink with a pointed head. Body has a complex pattern of stripes and spots in various shades of brown. SVL: 123 mm.

Where you'll see them

Distributed in the south of the Mallee, including the Big Desert Wilderness Park and Wyperfeld National Park, found in most habitat types including open woodlands, grasslands, shrublands, sandy areas with spinifex and rocky outcrops.

Breeding

Females lay between three and seven eggs which they bury in the soil. Young emerge in late summer and mature within 12 months.

Feeding

Forages between ground cover on insects, spiders, leaves and berries.

Interesting fact

The Large Striped Skink is a common tasty treat for the Eastern Brown Snake.

Desert Skink

Liopholis inornata



Photo Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Description

A robust body with a blunt head and smooth scales. Back light-brown to red-brown, with white sides. The fourth toe is much longer than the third. SVL: 84 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered in mallee vegetation, along ridges and dunes with hard-packed sand and spinifex. Excavates a substantial burrow, around 50 to 70 cm long, usually with a single entrance. In the Mallee region, they are found throughout the sandy areas of Murray-Sunset and Hattah-Hulkynne National Parks, and in the north of Big Desert Wilderness park.

Breeding

Females give birth to up to four live young. Maturity is reached at three to four years and lifespan is eight to 10 years.

Feeding

Forage on the ground, feeding on invertebrates.

Interesting fact

Active at night (nocturnal) and at dawn/dusk (crepuscular).

Heath Skink

Liopholis multiscutata

Threatened
(FFG Act)
Critically Endangered
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

A robust body with a blunt head and smooth scales. Body grey-brown with black stripes enclosing pale spots down length of back, disappearing near top of tail. The fourth toe is much longer than the third. SVL: 96 mm.

Where you'll see them

In Victoria, found only in the sandy heathland areas of the southern Big Desert and Wyperfeld National Park. They excavate multi-entranced tunnel systems (or warrens) beneath ground vegetation, along the upper slopes of large dunes.

Breeding

Females give birth to live young. Maturity is reached at three to four years and lifespan is eight to 10 years.

Feeding

Feeds on insects and other invertebrates, as well as some plant material.

Interesting fact

The Heath Skink was first discovered in Victoria in 1980 within sand dunes of the Big Desert.

Millewa Skink

Hemiergis millewae

Threatened
(FFG Act)
Critically Endangered
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body brown with a dark orange stripe down back. Pale grey on sides. Ear-opening is absent, instead represented by a depression. An elongated skink, with small limbs, each with five toes. SVL: 58 mm.

Where you'll see them

Restricted in the Mallee region to the far western edge and the far eastern corner of Murray-Sunset National Park, where it shelters in spinifex of the mallee woodlands. It relies on large spinifex hummocks and leaf litter, and has not been recorded in recently burnt areas.

Breeding

Females give birth to one or two live young in late summer.

Feeding

Feed on the invertebrates it finds in spinifex.

Interesting fact

The Millewa Skink was first recorded in Victoria in 1973 from the far western edge of Murray-Sunset National Park.

Bougainville's Skink

Lerista bougainvillii



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body silvery-grey to light brown, with a broad black stripe down side from the eye to the base of the tail. Tail underside flushed with yellow or red. It has small limbs (each with five toes) and as such moves in a snake-like manner. SVL: 70 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee region in areas sandy, or loose soil. Shelters in soil beneath rocks and logs and in leaf litter. Can be found beneath debris and mounds of rubbish.

Breeding

Females lay eggs.

Feeding

Feeds on invertebrates.

Interesting fact

The most southern species within the genus.

Spotted Burrowing Skink

Lerista punctatovittata



Photo Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Description

Body and tail is pinkish-brown and each scale has a black mark, aligning lengthways down body and tail. Limbs are very short and widely spaced. They have only one digit on their forelimbs and two on their hind limbs. SVL: 100 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee region in semi-arid woodlands, heathlands, grasslands, mallee woodlands, chenopod shrublands and disturbed habitats.

Breeding

Females typically lay two eggs in late spring or early summer.

Feeding

Feeds on a large range of invertebrates.

Quirky fact

Their reduced limbs help them to burrow and 'swim' through the soil. They move in a snake-like manner.

Dwarf Burrowing Skink

Lerista timida

Threatened
(FFG Act)
Endangered
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Elongated skink with very small limbs, each with three toes. Body colour brown to olive. SVL: 50 mm.

Where you'll see them

This lizard burrows underground beneath debris in dry woodland and shrubland communities. In the Mallee region, known only from the Merbein, Mildura, and Redcliffs areas.

Breeding

Females lay eggs.

Feeding

Feeds on invertebrates.

Grey's Skink

Menetia greyii



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body colour grey to brownish-grey with a broad black stripe down side of lizard from the eye to mid-tail. Underside is pale. Has four fingers and five toes. SVL: 38 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee in semi-arid woodlands, heathlands, grasslands, chenopod shrublands, mallee woodlands with spinifex and disturbed habitats.

Breeding

A mature male in breeding will have a yellow flush on its belly and a pink flush on its throat. Females lay eggs.

Feeding

They forage close to vegetation on a large variety of invertebrates.

Distinguishing fact

This is Victoria's smallest lizard.

Samphire Skink

Morethia adelaidensis

Threatened
(FFG Act)
Endangered
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body colour grey, olive-grey to brown, with dark dashes forming two broken lines along back. Pale underneath. SVL: 53 mm.

Where you'll see them

Within the Mallee region, they are found in samphire shrublands, often near salty areas. They shuttle between bushes and under debris.

Breeding

Females lay one to six eggs in late spring or early summer. Males are flushed with orange on their chin, chest, limbs and tail during the breeding season.

Feeding

Feed on a variety of invertebrates.

Interesting fact

Like most lizards, Samphire Skinks love the sun, which gives them energy for activity.

Boulenger's Skink

Morethia boulengeri



Photo Marcia Riederer

Description

Body grey to copper-brown, with a broad black side stripe and a lighter stripe below. Underside is white. SVL: 50 mm.

Where you'll see them

Widespread in the Mallee region, found in woodlands as well as farm lands and other disturbed areas. Boulenger's Skinks are found mainly in areas with heavy soils. They shuttle between bushes and under debris.

Breeding

Females lay one to six eggs in late spring or early summer. Mature males are flushed with red-orange on their chin and throat during the breeding season.

Feeding

Feed on a variety of invertebrates.

Obscure Skink

Morethia obscura



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body pale grey to olive-grey, with dark and light scattered specks and a weak stripe down its side. SVL: 56 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered in the Mallee on sandy soils in woodlands, heathlands and shrublands.

Breeding

Females lay one to five eggs in late spring or early summer. Males are flushed with red on their chin and throat during the breeding season.

Feeding

Feeds on a variety of invertebrates.

Tree Skink

Egernia striolata



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

A relatively flat skink, grey in colour, darker on the sides. Upper lips white to pale grey. SVL: 119 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found along the Murray River floodplain. Shelters beneath loose bark of trees and in tree hollows.

Breeding

Females give birth to live young.

Feeding

Omnivorous, eating a combination of vegetation and invertebrates.

Fascinating fact

Often live communally in family groups.

Eastern Water Skink

Eulamprus quoyii



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

A glossy, medium sized skink. Body colour copper-brown to golden-brown with irregular black flecks. It has black stripe along the side of its body enclosing a few light flecks and grey lower flanks with dark flecks. SVL: 95 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in moist, riverine habitats along the Murray River. Often seen basking in the sun.

Breeding

Eastern Water Skinks mate in spring with females giving birth to up to nine live young in summer.

Feeding

Feed on arthropods such as spiders and scorpions.

Interesting fact

This skink will readily take to the water if disturbed.

Common Blue-tongued Lizard

Tiliqua scincoides



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Long, thick body with smooth scales, and a dark blue fleshy tongue. Body light to dark brown, and flushed with orange. Body pattern variable, but typically has six to nine dark mottled bands on body and seven to ten bands on the tail. SVL: 310 mm.

Where you'll see them

Only in the extreme southeast of the Mallee region, in grassland and shrubland habitats.

Breeding

Females give birth to up to 25 young.

Feeding

Feeds on flowers, fruits, foliage, spiders, snails, eggs and invertebrates.

Quirky fact

When threatened, the lizard will inflate its body, hiss and poke out its flat blue tongue.

Western Blue-tongued Lizard

Tiliqua occipitalis



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

A large lizard with a broad, triangular head. Body colour yellow-brown with four to six broad dark bands across body and around tail. A dark thick stripe runs from the eye to the ear. Has a broad, fleshy tongue. SVL: 320 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in mallee woodlands, heathlands and sometimes in disturbed habitats. Thought to be widespread in the Mallee region but they are infrequently encountered. Forage on the ground and bask in the morning sun. Shelters in burrows and beneath spinifex.

Breeding

Females give birth to four to 10 live young in mid summer. The young eat the placental membrane immediately after birth.

Feeding

Feeds on vegetation and invertebrates. Its jaw is very powerful, allowing it to crush the hard protective coverings of invertebrates such as cockroaches.

Quirky fact

When threatened, the Western Blue-tongued Lizard will open its mouth to extend its blue tongue and hiss.

Stumpy-tailed Lizard

Tiliqua rugosa



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

Body is thick, head is broad and triangular, tail is short and thick, and the scales are large. Body colour varies from dark-brown to black, irregularly flecked with lighter colours. Underside pale with dark bands. Broad, fleshy blue tongue. SVL: 310 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee region, in disturbed habitats, roadside verges, open woodlands and heathlands.

Breeding

Stumpy-tail Lizards are monogamous (mating with the same partner for life). Mating occurs in spring and the males guard their partner very closely from other males. Females give birth to one to three live young in late summer or early autumn.

Feeding

Feeds on flowers and other fleshy vegetation, and some invertebrates.

Interesting fact

Its tail contains fat stores, which are drawn upon for reproduction or during dormancy in winter.

Nobbi Dragon

Amphibolurus nobbi



Photo Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Description

This dragon has five lengths of spines running from its head to the base of its tail, as well as an arc of spines behind the ear. Body colour pale to dark grey with broad stripes or blotches in white or yellow to orange-brown. Mouth interior pink. Exposed ear openings. SVL: 84 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in Mallee woodlands, where it is often seen basking on logs and small trees.

Breeding

Breeding males are flushed with salmon pink on sides and tail with two bright yellow stripes on the back. Females lay between six and eight eggs.

Feeding

Feeds on termites, grasshoppers and other invertebrates.

Amazing fact

Able to run on two legs.

Norris's Dragon

Amphibolurus norrisi



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

This dragon has five lengths of spines running from its head to the base of its tail, plus scattered spines on the thighs. Body colour grey with a dark stripe from snout through eye to the ear. Bands along length of tail. Mouth interior yellow. Exposed ear openings. SVL: 115 mm.

Where you'll see them

Found in Mallee woodlands and heathlands, especially where there are Cypress Pines. In the Mallee region, Norris's Dragons are restricted to the Big Desert Wilderness Park and Wyperfeld National Park.

Breeding

Males fight each other during the spring mating season. Females lay three to eight eggs in November and bury them in soil covered in leaf litter. Eggs hatch after 80 days and mature in 12 months.

Feeding

Feeds on ants, grasshoppers, beetles, other insects and berries. Have also been reported as eating flowers and skinks as well.

Fascinating fact

Like many other lizards, the Norris's Dragon is very shy and will retreat up a tree when approached too closely. It can run on two legs.

Mallee Dragon

Ctenophorus fordii



Photo Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Description

A small dragon with red-brown to grey-brown body colour with prominent stripes and blotches. The throat of a male has dark markings. Underside is white. SVL: 58 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee region, most frequently in mallee woodlands with spinifex. They are not found north of the Murray-Sunset and Hattah-Kulkyne National Parks.

Breeding

Males are territorial and mate in spring. Females lay two or three eggs up to three times a season. Eggs hatch after 50-70 days.

Feeding

Feeds on insects, especially ants.

Interesting fact

Mallee Dragons have a short lifespan of 12-18 months.

Painted Dragon

Ctenophorus pictus



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

Has a small ridge of scales along its back. Males are blue-grey with a dark stripe down the ridge of their back, surrounded by a pattern of light and dark bars across their back. Its head is flushed with orange to brown. Female body patterns similar but with duller colours. SVL: 65 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee region in a variety of habitat areas. Common around salt lakes and in white sand areas of Mallee heathland communities.

Breeding

When breeding, males are flushed with bright blue, red, yellow or orange. Females lay two to five eggs in summer.

Feeding

Feeds on insects, especially ants.

Interesting fact

Become dormant over winter, retreating to a sealed burrow.

Central Bearded Dragon

Pogona vitticeps



Photo Marcia Riederer

Description

Body covered in spines, which are especially prominent across the throat and down the sides. Body colour grey to dark orange. Mouth interior yellow. SVL: 250 mm.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee region, in mallee and chenopod woodlands, heathlands and roadside verges. Often seen basking on fences or logs.

Breeding

Females lay seven to 50 eggs in late spring or early summer.

Feeding

Feeds on vegetation and insects.

Quirky fact

When threatened, the Central Bearded Dragon's throat expands. It bobs its head to show dominance or waves its hand to indicate submission.

Lined Earless Dragon

Tympanocryptis lineata

Threatened
(FFG Act)
Critically Endangered
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Peter Robertson

Description

Body is wide and is grey-brown, yellow-brown or red-brown in colour. Body pattern made up of white stripes along length of body and dark bars across the body. SVL: 58 mm.

Where you'll see them

Only known at a handful of sites in the Victorian Mallee, including Lake Tyrrell. Found in chenopod shrublands and in open grasslands. Seen perched on logs or mounds, basking in the sun.

Breeding

Females lay up to four eggs at a time, in sandy burrows for protection.

Feeding

Feeds on insects such as ants and other invertebrates.

Quirky Fact

Unlike other dragons, Lined Earless Dragons' external ear openings are absent.

Sand Goanna

Varanus gouldii



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

A large lizard with a long, vertically compressed tail, and a forked tongue similar to a snake's. Body colour grey to dark-brown with red, brown, yellow or white blotches that form bands across body. Tail has coloured bands down length of it. Total size to tip of tail 1.6 m long, but usually smaller.

Where you'll see them

Scattered throughout the Mallee region in mallee heathlands and grasslands. Found also on farmlands. Will flee rapidly if approached too closely.

Breeding

Females dig a chamber to lay three to 10 eggs. Also known to use termite mounds. Eggs hatch after 170 – 260 days.

Feeding

Actively forages in holes, crevices and logs, feeding on a variety of lizards, snakes, frogs, invertebrates, small mammals and birds.

Amazing fact

The Sand Goanna is the most widespread goanna in Australia. They dig complex tunnels that often extend into the burrows of other animals.

Tree Goanna

Varanus varius

Endangered
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

A powerful, very large lizard with strong clawed feet and a deep, forked tongue. Tail is flattened along its sides, and the head is long, slender and pointed. Body colour dark grey to blue-black with scattered cream spots forming bands across body and tail. Total length: up to 2 metres.

Where you'll see them

Found in woodlands and along the Murray River floodplain. They are arboreal (shelter in trees).

Breeding

Females lay eggs within termite mounds found in trees or on land.

Feeding

Forages widely for prey. They will raid picnic and camping grounds, as well as poultry and egg farms.

Distinguishing fact

Also known as Lace Monitor, the Tree Goanna is the largest lizard in Victoria.

Rosenberg's Goanna

Varanus rosenbergii

Threatened
(FFG Act)
Endangered
(DSE Advisory list)



Photo Michael Williams, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Description

A large lizard with a long neck, narrow snout and a tail with flattened sides. Body colour is dark grey to black, with yellow spots forming distinct bands across body. Tail is yellow with dark bands, and limbs are dark with yellow spots. They have strong claws and a deeply forked tongue. Total length: 1.3 m.

Where you'll see them

In the Mallee region, isolated populations are found in the Big Desert Wilderness Park in mallee woodland and heathland vegetation communities. A terrestrial goanna, the Rosenberg's Goanna excavates its own burrow under low vegetation.

Breeding

Mates in late spring/early summer and females lay six to 12 eggs, using termite mounds as nests.

Feeding

Forages widely within its established home range upon lizards, snakes, rodents and invertebrates.

Distinguishing fact

Also known as Heath Monitor. The yellow markings vary in colour intensity from bright in juveniles to pale in some adults.

