



STUDENT FACT SHEET

BRONZEBACK LEGLESS LIZARD

Ophidiocephalus taeniatus

The Bronzeback Legless Lizard's inoffensive appearances oppose its ferocious appetite and its capacity to successfully capture and consume prey of quite considerable size. It eats mainly insects, such as beetles, termites and small cockroaches, as well as spiders. To eat things larger than what will fit into its mouth it grips its prey with its jaws, and performs a crocodile-like death roll to pull bite-sized pieces off. These highly coordinated maneuvers barely shift the leaf litter in which the Bronzeback lives. Bronzebacks are very secretive and spend almost all of their time in deep leaf litter, usually emerging only if disturbed by trampling by large animals, flooding or if making a rare change of home.

IDENTIFICATION

The Bronzeback has a slender snake-like body with a long blunt-ended tail and a rounded snout that is distinctively wedge-shaped in profile. The bodies of adults are slightly thinner than a normal drinking straw and they can grow to 27cm and weigh about 5.5 grams.

The back is uniformly coloured while the top of the head is greyish-white. The belly is a slightly mottled whitish grey and the sides are brownish grey. When handled all legless

lizards can make a high-pitched squeak and shed their tails.

HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION

Bronzebacks have a patchy distribution and mainly live along temporary watercourses flowing out of stony tablelands and breakaways. They are found in a relatively small area, in a strip that runs north from around Coober Pedy, towards the Northern Territory border.

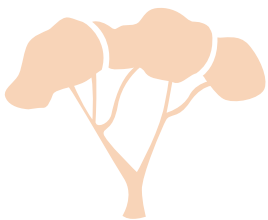
Bronzebacks prefer undisturbed, deep leaf litter that is underlain with a layer of loose sand and decomposed leaves.

POTENTIAL THREATS TO BRONZEBACKS

Bronzebacks persist in small local populations in narrow, linear pockets of ideal litter habitat along watercourses making them vulnerable to localized declines and extinctions. Heavy stocking along watercourses can result in the modification of these patches of habitat, making them unsuitable for Bronzebacks. Natural events such as flash flooding may also wash away the leaf litter that they live in. In this arid environment, this leaf litter may take years or decades to replenish enough for Bronzebacks to move back in.



Australian Government



FOCUS QUESTION

Why is leaf litter important to Bronzeback Legless Lizards?

Bronzeback Legless Lizard. Photograph by Harald Ehmann.



Bronzeback Legless Lizards appear to prefer Gidgee lined watercourses. Photograph by Harald Ehmann.





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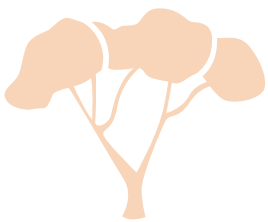
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FOCUS QUESTION

Draw a range of
food that a Pernatty
Knob-tailed Gecko
might eat.



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PERNATTY KNOB-TAIL GECKO

Nephrurus deleani

Pernatty Knob-tailed Geckos are ground-dwelling nocturnal lizards, leaving their burrows at night to hunt for their food in their sandy habitats. They eat a range of invertebrates, including spiders, scorpions, beetles and other insects, and may even eat smaller species of geckoes! When hunting, they typically walk in circuits from their home burrow, with frequent stops and occasional short rushes for prey. Before dawn they return to their home burrow, or dig a new one and then backfill the opening from the inside to conceal the entrance. Their burrows are up to 3 metres in length and 90cm deep to avoid high summer temperatures. Pernatty Knob-tails are active on warm nights only, in temperatures between 12 degrees and 35 degrees celsius.

IDENTIFICATION

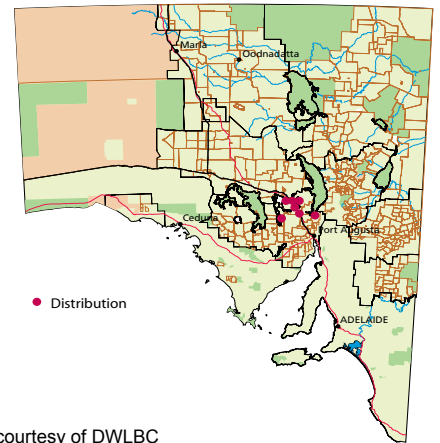
Pernatty Knob-tailed Geckoes grow to 13cm long and can weigh up to 25 grams. They have a large head and short thin tail, which usually has a ball-like end. Individuals that have lost their tails and grown another do not have the knob-tail ending. There are other similar species of knob-tail geckoes. The most common of these is the Smooth Knob-tailed Gecko (*Nephrurus levis*), which has a much fatter knob-tail.

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

This species is only known for an area of about 500 square kilometres. It occurs north of Port Augusta, to the east of Lake Torrens, near

Island Lagoon and Lake Macfarlane and around Pernatty Lagoon.

Pernatty Knob-tail Geckos are found on the crests and slopes of sand dunes.



Map courtesy of DWLBC

POTENTIAL THREATS TO PERNATTY KNOB-TAILED GECKOS

The abundance and distribution data for this species is so recent that we are unable to assess whether there has been any long-term change in its distribution or abundance.

In the short term we know that foxes and cats prey on these geckos. Foxes also compete with the geckos for food, as the diet of both species includes a high number of adult scorpions.

Pernatty Knob-tail Gecko. Photograph by Harald Ehmann.

Pernatty Knob-tail Gecko habitat. Photograph by Harald Ehmann.

