

Ornamental snake



Ornamental snake habitat © Craig Eddie

Description

The ornamental snake has a stout body, which grows to a total length of around 42 centimetres. Its body is greyish brown on top and the underside is cream, often with darker streaks or flecks on the outer edges of the belly. The entire head, and at least the fore body, is very finely peppered with dark brown or black. The lips of the ornamental snake are distinctly barred.

Distribution

The ornamental snake occurs exclusively in central Queensland and was thought to be restricted to the Dawson and Fitzroy River drainage systems. Its geographic range has recently been extended north-east to the Collinsville district. Habitat clearance has been extensive in this region.



Scientific Name:

Denisonia maculata

Conservation Status

Vulnerable - *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (National)

Vulnerable - *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Queensland)

Habitat

The ornamental snake can be found on floodplains, undulating clay plains and along the margins of swamps, lakes and watercourses. It also occurs on adjoining areas of slightly elevated ground with clay and sandy loams. It has been recorded in woodlands and open woodlands of coolabah, poplar box, belah and brigalow, as well as fringing vegetation along watercourses and grasslands. Ornamental snakes have also been found in cleared woodlands that contain adequate ground cover and shelter sites, such as logs.

Ecology and Life Cycle

The ornamental snake is a nocturnal species which shelters under fallen timber, rocks and bark and in deep soil cracks. Suitable habitat may support a high population density, with numbers dropping sharply with a shift in soil type or topography.

It is capable of flattening its body when disturbed or when squeezing through a narrow space. This mechanism is also used as a defence posture where the body is depressed and held in a series of stiff curves, from which it will thrash about and bite savagely if approached.

The ornamental snake feeds almost exclusively on frogs. They bear live young with an average of six to eight per litter.



Ornamental snake © Steve Wilson

Key Threats

Grazing effects: Overgrazing by stock results in habitat degradation through soil compaction, erosion and alteration of the vegetation community. Small remnants and isolated unconnected strips of vegetation are often used as areas of shade for cattle. The isolation of remnants combined with heavy grazing pressure may result in significant changes to remnant vegetation condition such as loss of plant material and ground cover.

Feral animals: Frog-eating snakes, such as the ornamental snake, are at risk of poisoning through the ingestion of cane toads. Destruction of wetland habitat by feral pigs is a major threat to this species, along with the associated destruction of frog habitat and direct competition for their food source (frogs).

Mining: There are many coal mines within the species distribution, and as the industry is experiencing a boom, the pressures from mining activities are likely to increase. The impact of this to the ornamental snake includes additional habitat disturbance, more road construction and an increase in traffic including heavy vehicles.

This species should be treated with caution as its' bite can produce severe effects.

How to help

- Avoid removing or disturbing native vegetation, particularly near creeks, water courses or rivers.
- Undertake coordinated feral pig control measures.
- Undertake cane toad control measures where practicable.
- Control grazing in riparian zones to protect the ground cover and reduce soil erosion.
- If burning, use cool burns in a mosaic pattern that promote patchiness and leave areas of ground cover unburnt.
- Consider entering into a conservation agreement (e.g. Land for Wildlife, Nature Refuges or incentive agreements through grant programs) for conservation and land management assistance.
- Report sightings to WWF-Australia, the Queensland Museum or the EPA/QPWS.
- Leave snakes alone. They are protected under State legislation and it is illegal to harm them, not to mention potentially dangerous.

To find out more about saving threatened species check out www.wwf.org.au/tsn or contact the Threatened Species Network at tsn@wwf.org.au.



The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.



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