

# Five-clawed worm-skink



Five-clawed worm-skink habitat © Alison Goodland

## Description

The five-clawed worm-skink is a medium-sized reduced-limb skink with three fingers and two toes. It is shiny and wormlike in appearance with dark brown to greyish colouring above and pale yellow-green below. Individual scales have a dark spot in the centre, giving an appearance of a series of lines along the body. This pattern is more conspicuous in northern populations.

## Distribution

The five-clawed worm-skink is distributed throughout a relatively small area in sub-humid regions along the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range. This range extends from north-eastern New South Wales to the eastern Darling Downs in southern Queensland. Its total range appears to have contracted eastwards and is now largely confined to relict roadside verges.

## Habitat

Queensland populations have been recorded in remnant native grasslands of the Condamine floodplain, characterized by deep-cracking clay soils and minimal to no tree cover.

In New South Wales, this species prefers open woodland areas with low closely spaced tussock grasses and scattered eucalypts. This type of woodland is generally supported by deep cracking, inundation-prone, dark

clay loams adjacent to or on the lower slopes of slight rises, usually of reddish soil. The five-clawed worm-skink has also been found in open grassy paddocks with scattered eucalypts and moist black soil.

## Ecology and Life Cycle

In captivity it has been known to eat crawling insects and insect larvae. The few known adults collected in spring were reproductively active, with females carrying one or two eggs.



## Scientific Name:

*Anomalopus mackayi*

## Conservation Status

Vulnerable - IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (International)

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

Endangered - *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Queensland)



Five-clawed worm-skink © Steve Wilson

## Key Threats

*Loss of habitat due to clearing and thinning:* This lizard is under considerable risk of extinction. Maintenance of remnant patches of native grassland in the Darling Downs is critical for its survival.

*Soil structure decline:* *Lippia Phyla canescens* is a major threat to the maintenance of soil structure in cracking clay soils across this skink's range. *Lippia* dries out the soil profile and out-competes other native ground cover, exposing the soil to erosion and soil structure decline. The soils distinctive 'cracks' collapse, reducing shelter and refuge sites. The loss of ground cover also leaves this skink exposed and unsheltered when the cracks close up after rainfall.

*Inappropriate roadside management:* Roadsides and road reserves often provide suitable reptile habitat.

These areas are often islands of native vegetation in a fragmented landscape providing important refuge sites. Threats can arise from inappropriate roadside burns, slashing and road widening.

*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.

The five-clawed worm-skink lives down cracks in the clay soils and in permanent tunnel-like burrows under well-embedded logs and rocks.

## How to help

- Avoid disturbing remnant strips or patches of native grassland or woodland.
- Manage cropping headlands to retain grass cover.
- Control and reduce the spread of *Lippia* and other invasive weeds, where possible. Maintenance of a healthy ground layer is vitally important.
- Retain fallen timber and ground cover as these provide essential habitat.
- Ensure grazing practices are sustainable, maintaining good ground cover and soil structure.
- 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. Taking a photo of live or dead specimens is useful to help identification.

To find out more about saving threatened species check out [www.wwf.org.au/tsn](http://www.wwf.org.au/tsn) or contact the Threatened Species Network at [tsn@wwf.org.au](mailto:tsn@wwf.org.au).



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



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