

# Yakka skink

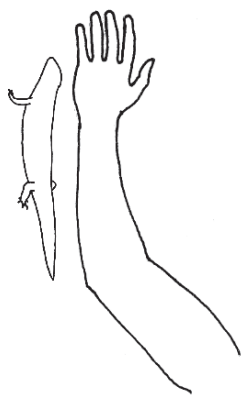


Yakka skink habitat © Craig Eddle

## Description

The yakka skink is a robust lizard with a thick tail and short legs around the same size as a blue tongue lizard. Its body colour ranges from pale to dark brown, usually with a broad dark brown stripe extending along the back from the neck to the tail. This dark stripe is bordered on either side by a narrow, pale fawn stripe. Some of the scales at the rear of its head are fragmented, so it lacks the symmetrical arrangement of other skinks. There are several large, plate-like scales along the leading edge of the ear, partly concealing the opening.

The average size from head to tail tip is 40 centimetres, making it one of the largest skinks in the region.



## Scientific Name:

*Egernia rugosa*

## Conservation Status

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

Vulnerable - *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Queensland)

## Distribution

The core of the yakka skink's distribution is within the Mulga Lands and Brigalow Belt South bioregions. Other populations are scattered throughout the Brigalow Belt North (east to the Rockhampton area) and Einasleigh Uplands bioregions, extending northwards to southern Cape York Peninsula. Recent surveys have detected populations along the Queensland/New South Wales border.

## Habitat

Yakka skinks occur in a wide variety of vegetation types including poplar box, ironbark, brigalow, white cypress pine, mulga, bendee and lancewood woodlands and open forests. Substrates include rock, sand, clay and loamy red earth. They can persist in clearings where shelter sites such as tunnel erosion, rabbit warrens and log piles exist.

## Ecology and Life Cycle

The yakka skink is active during cooler parts of the day, dusk and sometimes at night. Individuals dig a deep burrow system under and between partly buried rocks or logs, or into old root tracts at the base of remnant stumps. They may also utilise old rabbit warrens, deep gullies, tunnel erosion/sinkholes or under rural buildings.



Yakka skink © Steve Wilson



Yakka Skink habitat © Craig Eddie

The yakka skink is omnivorous, consuming a wide variety of invertebrates (beetles, grasshoppers, spiders) that venture into or near the burrow entrance. They also consume soft plant materials and fruits.

It produces live young with around six per litter.

### Key Threats

*Loss of habitat due to clearing and thinning:* The focus of vegetation clearing in the Brigalow Belt is shifting from the essentially cleared Brigalow ecosystems on fertile soils to the eucalypt woodlands on poorer soils. Consequently the survival of dry woodland/open forest species with limited geographic ranges and/or specialised habitat requirements, such as the yakka skink, remain uncertain unless conservation action is undertaken.

*Inappropriate roadside management:* Roadsides and road reserves often provide suitable reptile habitat. Populations of reptiles that live within linear remnants,

such as roadside strips, are particularly vulnerable to disturbances that remove essential microhabitat features, for example, rocks, logs, dense leaf litter and fallen bark. Road widening and maintenance works may also impact on yakka skink populations by destroying burrows.

*Removal of wood debris and rocks:* This species is threatened by the removal of its microhabitat, which includes partly buried rocks, fallen logs and leaf litter.

*Ripping of rabbit warrens:* The practice of ripping rabbit warrens has been known to kill womas, as well as destroying an important shelter site for this species.

*Feral animals:* The yakka skink is vulnerable to predation by foxes and feral cats.

An extremely secretive species, its presence is often indicated by scats near the burrow entrances.

### How to help

- Maintain large, healthy, connected patches of suitable habitat – for example poplar box, ironbark, brigalow and mulga woodlands.
- Retain fallen timber and ground cover as these provide essential habitat.
- Implement coordinated feral animal control measures.
- Survey roadsides before undertaking road widening or maintenance operations. Flag and protect suitable habitat and burrows if found.
- Avoid disturbance of colonies by ensuring grazing practices are sustainable, maintaining good ground cover or restricting grazing by fencing if necessary.
- 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. 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.

