

# ALPINE SKINKS



Australian Government



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

# FACTSHEET

Alpine Water Skink *Eulamprus kosciuskoi*;  
Conservation Status (Victoria): Critically Endangered\*

Alpine She-oak Skink *Cyclodomorphus praealtus*;  
Conservation Status (Victoria): Endangered\*

\*Advisory List of Rare or Threatened Vertebrate Fauna, Department of Sustainability and Environment (2003) and listed under *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*

## What do they look like?

Generally, skinks (family *Scincidae*) are small- to medium-sized lizards.

Two threatened alpine skinks are the Alpine she-oak skink — a relatively broad-headed, short-legged, smooth-scaled lizard and the Alpine water skink – a robust skink, with a body length of up to 80 millimetres.

## Where do they live?

Although some alpine skink species also occur in other parts of Victoria, several are endemic to the Alps. Nearly half of the skinks are officially listed as threatened by the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment. Some of these reptiles are abundant and readily observed, whilst others are rare and/or secretive.

The Alpine water skink is restricted to sphagnum bogs, streamsides and wet heath vegetation. Their alpine bog community habitat has been nominated for listing under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The Alpine she-oak skink is known from only a handful of restricted, treeless locations in the Alps.

## What do they eat?

Skinks are carnivorous (meat-eating) predators. They prey principally on arthropods — animals with an external skeleton and jointed legs including grasshoppers, ants, bees, wasps, cicadas, cockroaches, fleas, butterflies, spiders, scorpions, ticks, centipedes and millipedes.

## Did you know?

- The reptile fauna of Australia is highly distinct. A remarkable 89 per cent of the more than 750 reptile species found in

Australia and its external territories occur nowhere else in the world.

- The reptile fauna of the alpine region of Victoria is dominated by skinks (in terms of numbers), although one dragon lizard and three venomous snakes also occur in this area.
- Two other Victorian alpine skinks, the Alpine bog skink (*Pseudemoia cryodroma*) and the Guthega skink (*Egernia guthega*) are also threatened with extinction in Victoria.
- The Alpine skinks give birth to live young.
- A large proportion of the known range of the Alpine she-oak skink occurs within, or adjacent to, the Mt Hotham and Falls Creek Alpine Resorts.



Alpine Water Skink – *Eulamprus kosciuszko*  
CREDIT: Nick Clemann

## Building resilience: Saving Alpine Skinks

One of the key threatening processes that may be affecting Alpine skinks includes the loss or modification of habitat and biological processes due to climate change. Computer models predicting the impact of climate change suggest that arctic and alpine regions will be greatly

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reduced in extent because of increases in temperature and a reduction in snow cover. Studies of the Snowy Mountains suggests that even a modest amount of warming (only 0.6°C) would result in a 39 per cent reduction in the area that receives 30 days of snow per year.

Plant species adapted to these cold climates could be at risk of extinction as a result of competition from other species, and many fauna species are unable to simply walk away from an area in search of more suitable habitat. In any case, the habitat they require may no longer be available anywhere else.

Evidence from the Snowy Mountains also suggests that feral animals are going to be more able to access higher-altitude areas, with potentially disastrous consequences for many native species, including skinks.

Without healthy alpine sphagnum bogs, streamsidings, wet heath vegetation and grasslands, our alpine skinks are in peril. We must do all we can to preserve the habitat of these skink species, and all other threatened alpine flora and fauna species, as a way of building resilience into the overall alpine environment.



Alpine She-oak Skink – *Cyclodomorphus praealtus* CREDIT: Nick Clemann

### What's being done?

There has been considerable effort in recent times to improve our knowledge of the distribution of threatened alpine skinks, and to better understand their habitat requirements. Surveys have given us more information about where these species occur, and research has shed light on the habitat preferences of the Alpine she-oak skink and Alpine water skink. It is hoped that the results of this work will greatly improve the management of these animals, and improve their future survival chances.

### How you can help

- Leave your pets at home. Feral predators are a danger to threatened alpine animals.

Further harassment by domestic animals can worsen this situation. It is illegal to bring dogs and cats into the Alpine National Park.

- Stop the spread of weeds. Invasive weeds are a major environmental threat in the alps, and seeds can be spread on footwear and camping gear. Always try to make sure that seeds are removed from any clothing or other equipment before heading into the alps.
- Keep to tracks when walking and driving in the alps. Low, dense vegetation is an important habitat feature for alpine reptiles. Trampling of this vegetation can destroy vital habitat components.
- Save on heating and cooling costs by insulating, draught-sealing and shading, while setting thermostats appropriately. For more information see the 'Heating and Cooling' fact sheet of the *Your Home Technical Manual* [www.greenhouse.gov.au/yourhome/](http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/yourhome/)
- Switch off lights, appliances and equipment when they're not needed and install energy-efficient fluorescent lamps such as compact fluorescent lights.
- Walk, cycle or use public transport.
- Minimise waste of packaging and materials – refuse, reduce, re-use, recycle.
- For other tips on saving energy around the home, go to the Australian Greenhouse Office web site: [www.greenhouse.gov.au/gwci/index.html](http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/gwci/index.html)

You can also find out more information about Australia's threatened species by visiting [www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened](http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened) or by contacting the Department of the Environment and Heritage Community Information Unit, E-mail [ciu@deh.gov.au](mailto:ciu@deh.gov.au), or Free call 1800 803 772.

Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment  
<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/>  
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