



TJAKURA

Giant Desert Skink ~ *Egernia kintorei*

What do they look like?

The Tjakura is a large skink which grows up to 45cm long and can weigh 350g. It is a very distinctive orange colour with a white or yellow belly. A more common, related skink (tjaliri) is found across the APY lands. They are smaller in size, have smaller burrows and are plain in colour.



Photos: M. Daniel

Where do they live?

Tjakura were rediscovered in the Watarru area by some Anangu Minmya hunting for Tinka (sand goannas) in 1998 and are not known from anywhere else in South Australia. Anangu and Piranpa were very excited by the rediscovery of an animal that was thought to be extinct in the APY lands. Tjakura are also found in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Tjakura live in extensive, multi-entrance burrow systems that have a prominent 'latrine' or toilet area. A burrow houses a family group consisting of a pair of adults and their tjitji, who may stay for a number of years. In winter Tjakura

hibernate in their burrows becoming active during the hotter months.

What do they eat?

Anumara caterpillar is a favourite Tjakura food. They also eat termites, beetles and other insects, small reptiles and some flowers.

Why are they threatened?

Tjakura were once distributed more widely throughout the western deserts. Due to this range contraction they are classed as being vulnerable to extinction. They may be preyed upon by cats, foxes and dingoes and compete for burrows with rabbits. Camels and cattle can also affect Tjakura by trampling on their burrows. Unplanned wildfires may also affect Tjakura, who prefer open habitat that is a result of a long time since fire and well planned patch-burning. Wildfires are generally hotter, more extensive and can kill more animals and their food sources.

What is APY Land Management doing?

- Searching for more Tjakura colonies. Since 1998 Anangu from Watarru and APY Land Management have recorded 8 different Tjakura colonies, estimated at 270 individuals.

- The number of individuals living in a burrow is estimated from the number of burrow entrances and pop holes, the size of the latrine and the presence of adult, subadult and juvenile kuna.

Photos: T. Partridge



Wadi Tjakura and Mary Pan inspecting a Tjakura latrine (left), adult, subadult and tjitji kuna (middle), Tinpulya Mervin at a Tjakura piti (right).

- Each known Tjakura colony is monitored yearly for changes in status, eg the first colony discovered has now declined from 13 active burrows to just one, however a nearby colony has now been recorded and increased in size. It is thought that Tjakura may move from an area when its food resources are depleted or if predation occurs.
- A number of management activities are also supported by APY Land Management including patchburning in country around Tjakura colonies and protection of Tjakura burrows from camels through stick fences.

How you can help?

Look after and de-sex your pet cats and dogs so that they don't escape into the wild and kill native animals. Look after fire and only burn with advice from your elders. Listen to stories about Tjakura. Learn what different animal's piti and kuna looks like. Work hard at school and get a job with APY Land Management to help look after Tjakura.

More information:

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