

The Lesser Known Victorian Herps
***Egernia inornata*: The Desert Skink**

By Scott Eipper
65 Grange rd Caulfield East 3145

Rosen first described the Desert or Rosen's Skink in 1905. The name "inornata" means Plain (Ehmann, 1992). Throughout its range its said to be relatively common to abundant, this is also the same in Victoria however its not always seen due to it habit of remaining more or less concealed and its crepuscular habits. Throughout Australia it is found in All of the mainland states (Lower inland of Western Australia, Southern Northern Territory, South Western Queensland, Western New South Wales, The North West of Victoria and throughout much of arid South Australia) (Cogger, 2000).

The habitat of this species is most arid area that have soft, loamy or sandy soils, doted with Porcupine Grass and other small shrubs. Under a bush or clump of porcupine grass it constructs a large burrow system that can be up to 50 cm's deep by 180 cm's long (Ehmann, 1992). The Entrance to the burrow system generally faces NorthWest (Wilson and Knowles, 1988); also at the main Entrance a small pile of sand may be present. The burrow then goes into a chamber in which the lizard sleeps, from here there may be a number of escape tunnels, which are used if a predator enters the burrow. Entrances to these escape tunnels are kept short of the surface by about a centimetre. These narrow tunnels maybe used as a secure initial morning basking site which the animal can start to warm up before he/she has to hunt (Ehmann, 1992). Also during winter a section of the burrow is caved in to provide a shelter during this inactive period, this is suspected throughout *E. inornata*'s range, but has only been recorded in Western Australian specimens (Wilson and Knowles, 1988).

E. inornata is a fairly small skink, at a length of 19 cm's total length (S. V. L. 8.4 cm's) while a length of 6 cm's (S.V.L.) is the average. Its head is blunt with a thick neck making it have the appearance of being larger than it really is. The base colour varies from light yellowish brown, through to bright reddish orange, this is subject to the surrounding habitat, red skink on red sand etc, the colour on the individual dorsal scales tends to lighten towards the end on the scale. They can be plain or patterned by very fine dark lines that run with the body, fine black spots are often present over most of the back, these black flecks form bands on the sides and tail. If the tail has been regenerated the colour is darker and less patterned. The ventral surface is white to cream.

The Desert Skink is a voracious lizard eating just about anything that will fit into its mouth. Ants, Termites, various other arthropods, centipedes, scorpions, spiders, small lizards and even small amounts of plant material have been recorded by various authors as food items for this species (Cogger, 2000, Ehmann, 1992, Greer, 1989, Swan, 1990, Swanson, 1987, Wilson and Knowles 1988). *E. inornata* is an ambush predator, usually sitting with its head just outside its burrow. When it sees a prey item walk past it rushes out and grabs the prey and eats it, then returning to its burrow, other prey like small lizards may be taken if the prey enters the burrow.

Neonates start to appear in September through to May, the size at birth being 3.5 to 4.5 cm's (Swan, 1990). The clutch sizes range from 1 to 4 the average being 2.

Tests done in controlled conditions have found that the Critical Thermal Maximum and Minimum Temperatures for this species are 42.8 and 9.5 to 10.1 degrees Celsius respectively. In juveniles only the Critical Thermal Minimum Temperature has been tested the results being 8.9 degrees Celsius (Greer, 1989).

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