Arid Zone Monitoring
Species Profile

Small reptiles

Small reptiles leave tracks that are seen during track-based surveys, but it can be hard to identify these tracks to the species. This profile has information on the some of the small reptiles tracks that are commonly found during surveys.

Small skinks

***Ctenotus* sp.**

Language names

Alyalkarr-alwaykarr, Alyalkarr-alyalkarr, Ikwarre, Iyenkarr, Jipila, Liwirungu/Wurrkarn, Murluny-murluny, Mutinga, Pupurla

Animal description

Ctenotus is the largest group of lizards in Australia, with nearly 100 species. Ctenotus skinks have smooth scales, long limbs with five toes and long tails.

Leopard skink, Ctenotus patherinus.

Burton's legless lizard

Lialis burtonis

Burton's legless lizards have a pointed snout, and very small flaps instead of front and back feet. Colour can be different depending on location.

Burton's legless lizard.

Legless lizard

Delma butleri

Delma butleri is greyish brown to olive brown with dark edges on the scales. All legless lizards are slender with smooth shiny scales.

Delma butleri.

Sand sliders

***Lerista* sp.**

Leristas have smooth scales and small ear openings. Some have 4 well-developed limbs, but most do not have any limbs (no front or back feet). Identification can be difficult.

Lerista labialis.

Tracks

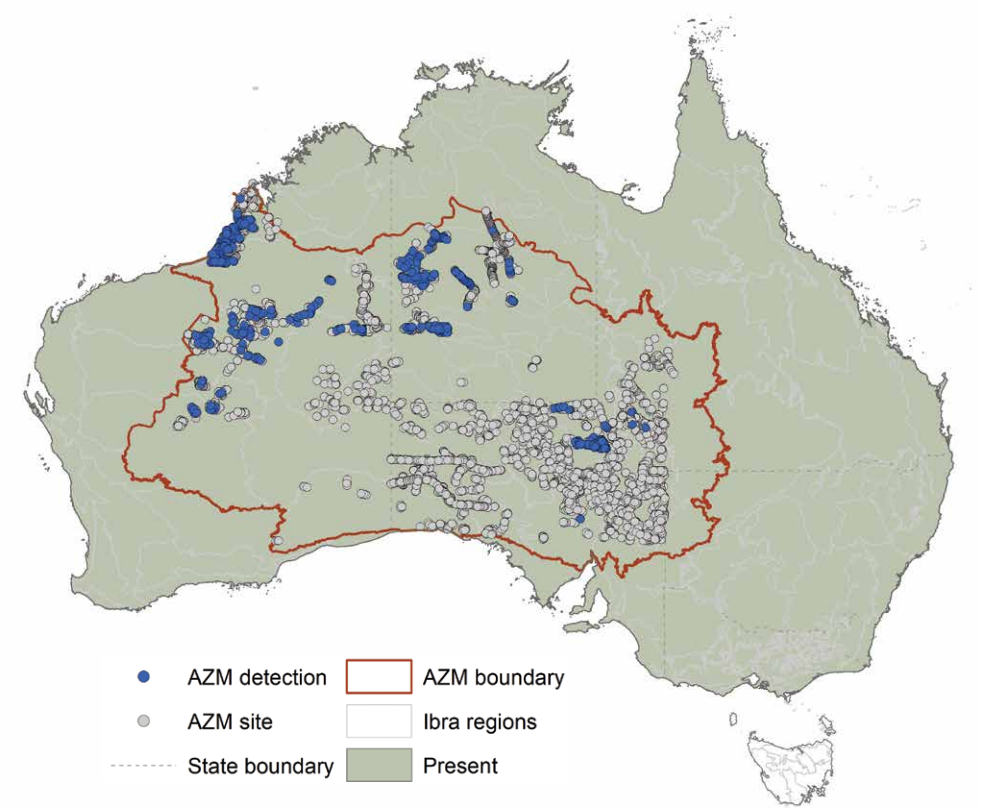
Small snakes and legless lizards make wavy tracks in the sand (arrow shows which way it is going).

Sand slider tracks.

Arid Zone Monitoring project findings

Small reptile distribution

Within the AZM dataset small reptiles were recorded at 11% of all surveys in the AZM dataset. These records were unidentified to the species level. Each blue dot shows a survey site where a small reptile was recorded. The grey dots show all the other sites that were surveyed, but where small reptiles were not recorded. These records were made by Indigenous Ranger groups, land councils, NGOs, government agencies and university researchers.



The map is based on data shared by data providers with the AZM project. The data are from track and sign surveys. This method is great for detecting species that live in sandy deserts, but not as good for species that prefer rocky habitats, or species with distributions that are mostly outside the central deserts. The method also works best for larger-bodied animals with tracks that are easily identified. It is possible that extra surveys have been carried out over the past 40 years that have not yet been shared. If you see 'gaps' in the maps that you could fill by sharing your data, please let us know.

Things to think about when surveying for small reptiles

- Survey during good conditions (not too windy or straight after rain).
- Organise to do surveys at regular times every year, for example before the wet or hot season (October) and in the early dry season or cool time (April).
- Follow advice of experienced trackers - know how to tell tracks apart before you go to survey.
- If you want to see if management actions (like right-way fire) are working, you need to sample many different sites, before and after the action. You might need help from a scientist to make the sampling design strong.

Further information

Arid Zone Monitoring project:

https://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/projects/arid-zone-monitoring-surveys-for-vertebrates-across-arid-and-semi-arid-zones

Threatened Species Recovery Hub

National Environmental Science Programme

This project received support from the Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program.

The Arid Zone Monitoring project is a collaboration between the NESP TSR Hub and over 30 Indigenous ranger groups and Indigenous organisations, 8 NGOs and NRM groups, 5 government agencies institutions, and many individual researchers and consultants. The project has gathered track and sign data from across Australia's deserts, using it to map the distributions of desert species and their threats. The national database includes almost 50,000 species presence records from over 5300 unique sites and almost 15,000 site visits, over the period from 1982 to 2020. The project area was defined by using IBRA subregional boundaries - the project boundary captures Australia's desert subregions where track and sign-based surveys are commonly used. The project showcases the collective work carried out by all groups working across the arid zone, and lays the groundwork for creating ongoing, national-scale monitoring for desert wildlife.

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