

Reptile roadkill reveals new threat to endangered lizard species

March 7 2024, by Lucien Wilkinson



The western spiny-tailed skink. Credit: Holly Bradley

The chance sighting of a dead snake beside a sandy track in remote Western Australia, and the investigation of its stomach contents, has led Curtin University researchers to record the first known instance of a spotted mulga snake consuming a pygmy spiny-tailed skink, raising

concerns for a similar-looking, endangered lizard species.

Lead researcher Dr. Holly Bradley from Curtin's School of Molecular and Life Sciences said the discovery of the partially digested [pygmy spiny-tailed skink](#) within the [snake](#) had implications for the vulnerable western spiny-tailed skink species.

The [research paper](#), "First record of Egernia predation by the range restricted Spotted Mulga Snake (*Pseudechis butleri*)" was [published](#) in the journal *Australian Zoologist*.

"Found about 300 km east of Geraldton and likely killed by a vehicle, the snake's consumption of the pygmy spiny-tailed skink raises concerns about the susceptibility of similar-sized juvenile western spiny-tailed skinks, which also inhabit the Mid-West region and are classified as endangered," Dr. Bradley said.

"Pygmy spiny-tailed skinks look and act a lot like babies of the endangered western spiny-tailed skink, which live in the same area, so if these snakes are preying on one of them, they are likely also preying on the other.

"Discovering a new potential predator for the western spiny-tailed skink is important for our understanding and management of this rare and threatened species and points to a need for further research to assess and mitigate potential threats to these reptiles."

Dr. Bradley said despite Australia's rich biodiversity of reptiles, there exists a significant gap in understanding their ecology, with the spotted mulga snake and the pygmy and western spiny-tailed skinks prime examples of understudied and quite mysterious reptiles.

"Understanding predator–prey dynamics can be useful for effective

conservation, especially for rare and [threatened species](#) such as the vulnerable western spiny-tailed skink," Dr. Bradley said.

"Australia is a hotspot for reptile diversity, but with much of our diversity in the remote, dry, and hot areas which are difficult to access, a lot is unknown about our native snakes and lizards.

"Discovering a new potential predator for western spiny-tailed skink represents an improvement in our understanding of Australian reptile ecology and can better inform [conservation efforts](#) and ensure the survival of our native reptilian species."

More information: Holly S. Bradley et al, First record of Egernia predation by the range restricted Spotted Mulga Snake *Pseudechis butleri*, *Australian Zoologist* (2024). [DOI: 10.7882/AZ.2024.003](https://doi.org/10.7882/AZ.2024.003)

Provided by Curtin University

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