

New velvet gecko discovered on one of Australia's northern islands

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Credit: Stuart Nielsen

Scientists from Queensland Museum, Griffith University, University of Melbourne and the Northern Territory Government have described a colorful new velvet gecko from Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory.

This species only occurs on Groote, Australia's third largest offshore island in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

The Groote Eylandt Velvet Gecko, *Oedura nesos*, is a large and colorful species with white bands and yellow spots that lives in rock crevices.

Perhaps even more striking than the adults, are the babies which are black with bright white bands.

Lead researcher Dr. Paul Oliver says "this species was formerly confused with another similar gecko we described in 2016, called *Oedura bella*, but we had some clues that it might not be the same."

"Fortunately we were able work with researchers from the Northern Territory Government and Traditional Owners and rangers from the

Anindilyakwa Land Council to get material for genetic analyses and pictures of the animal in life"

Dr. Graeme Gillespie, from The NT Department of Environment and Natural Resources, who led the work on Groote Eylandt, emphasizes that these discoveries really highlight the biological significance of Northern Australia's islands.

"These islands are also critically important refuges for many [threatened species](#) like northern hopping mouse and brush-tailed rabbit rat, that are declining on the mainland."

"We are now also discovering that many of them also have their own endemic species that are found nowhere else, and have been completely overlooked till now."

Mr Chris Jolly from University of Melbourne, also on the paper, further emphasized how our understanding of Top End lizard diversity is continuing to improve.

"I am currently writing a [field guide](#) to the reptiles of the Northern Territory, and the list of species I have to include is growing rapidly, and I'm struggling to keep up!"

"In the last year nine new [species](#) have been described from the NT."

"It's both exciting, and really important, because it means we are continually improving understanding of our region's biodiversity."

"We thank the traditional owners of Groote and Anindilyakwa land council for their support for this work."

More information: Paul M. Oliver, et al. 2020. A New Velvet Gecko (*Oedura*: Diplodactylidae) from Groote Eylandt, Northern Territory. *Zootaxa*. 4779(3); 438–450.

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Provided by Queensland Museum

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