

After four months average length had reached 76 mm.
At twelve months average length was 97 mm. with the two largest specimens being 105 and 106 mm. respectively.
Maximum length is reached in about four years.

Numbers in Captivity:

Figures taken from the N.Z. Herpetological Society's Annual Returns show an increasing number of Taranaki Geckos being kept in captivity by Society members.

| | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Year ending March | 1977 — 25 |
| " | 1978 — 27 |
| " | 1979 — 42 |
| " | 1980 — 55 |

It is pleasing to note that the 1979 figures of 42 Taranaki geckos show they are distributed within ten different collections, and no doubt the 1980 figure of 55 geckos will again show a wider spread of members keeping this very interesting gecko.

At the time of writing (March 1981) and including the five young Taranaki geckos recently born in my own collection, I know of 102 *H. chryosireticus* in captivity, of which just under 20% are being kept by non-Society members e.g. schools, kindergartens, children, etc.

Conclusion:

While it is apparent that the Taranaki Gecko is restricted in its distribution it would appear that it should not be described as an endangered species.

On the contrary — it has adapted well to the intrusion of man. Not only has it the ability to live around human habitation and survive the predations of domestic animals, but also with society becoming more affluent, and suburban gardens being increasingly planted with shrubs and flax plants, its future would appear to be becoming progressively secure.

Now that flax bushes have been identified as the major habitat for this species, I am sure that diligent searching will discover many more colonies, and ensure that *H. chryosireticus*, if not common, is certainly in no danger of extinction in the foreseeable future.

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SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RECORDS OF THE INLAND TAIPAN

(*OXYURANUS MICROLEPIDOTUS* McCoy, 1879)

Peter Mirtschin, 18 Creber St., Whyalla Playford, S.A. 5600

Introduction:

Rediscovery of the Inland Taipan (*Oxyuranus microlepidotus*) has created intense interest in this large, dangerous snake amongst herpetologists. Papers on its rediscovery, venom, medical significance and generic relationships have been published recently (Covacevich and Wombey, 1975, Sutherland, et al. 1978, Broad, et al 1979, Covacevich, et al. 1981, Fohlman, 1979). The distribution of *O. microlepidotus* in southwestern Queensland is well documented and it is known to occur in northeastern South Australia. New records of this medically significant and interesting species are presented here, together with a summary of South Australian Museum records.

New South Australian records of *O. microlepidotus*:

During a visit to Goyders Lagoon in October 1979 a dead specimen was found. On a further visit in April, 1980 3 live specimens and 2 sloughs were located.

Collection data:

- October, 1979 Birdsville Track (26°46' S, 139°10' E). The skull was removed but lost.
- 6th April, 1980 35km north of Clifton Hills homestead, Birdsville Track, S.A. (26°49' S, 139°01' E). Time 8.00am, temperature 21°–24° estimated, 10–15 knot gusty easterly wind.
Total length 176.00cm. Male.
Midbody scales 23, ventrals 224, anal single, sub-caudals 54, divided.
- 6th April, 1980 25km north of Clifton Hills homestead, Birdsville Track, S.A. (26°53' S, 139°00' E) time 10.35am, temperature 27°–29°C estimated, 15–20 knot easterly wind.
Total length 135.00cm. Male.
Midbody scales 23, ventrals 216, anal single, sub-caudals 52 (first 3 divided, next 3 single, rest divided).
- 7th April, 1980 33.3km north of Clifton Hills homestead Birdsville Track, S.A. (26°50' S, 139°01' E). Time 8.11am, temperature 21°C estimated, 15–20 knot easterly wind.
Total length 168.00cm. Male.
Midbody scales 23, ventrals 220, anal single, sub-caudals 60, divided.

Two sloughs were collected, the first 15km north of Clifton Hills homestead (26°55' S, 138°57' E) and the second 27.5km north of Clifton Hills homestead (26°54' S, 139°00' E). A third slough was found near the second but was too dry and tangled to remove.

Habitat:

The three live specimens and one of the sloughs were found in the river plain of the Goyders Lagoon. Very little vegetation exists, the dominant plant being the lignum bush (see Figure 1). The whole area when dry forms a ground surface of cracks.



FIGURE 1. Typical Habitat of *O. micrioepidotus*. Birdsville Track Goyders Lagoon.

The other slough was found on the fringe of an open plain with lignum and giant saltbush. *Rattus villosissimus* were found in this area in 1976.

Previous records of Oxyuranus microlepidotus in the South Australian Museum
R14618 Innamincka
R14649 Near Birdsville Track a few miles south of the S.A., Qld., border.
R14851 A—B Koonchera Dune, S.A., (26°47' S, 139°33' E).

Observations:

All three specimens attempted to bite the catching apparatus but were not unduly vicious. The second specimen was considerably more active, possibly due to the higher temperature at the time of capture.

One specimen arched its body into an S shaped posture on being approached. In addition to a warning threat, it enables a deceptive striking distance to be attained. Shortly after the specimens were caught they were photographed during which the threat pose was again observed. (see Figure 2).

By comparison with the *O. scutellatus*, *O. microlepidotus* is much slower moving in both travel and defence.

Faeces from one of the specimens contained long hair strands and was sent to the South Australian Museum for analysis. The hairs were found to be those of *Rattus villosissimus* (P. Aitken, personal communication).

O. microlepidotus hangs onto its prey after striking, whereas the Taipan (*O. scutellatus*) uses a snap bite, then holds off until the prey succumbs to the venom. The shorter fangs and the slower speed of the Inland Taipan possibly forces it to use this method.

Generally *O. microlepidotus* is far less excitable in disposition than *O. scutellatus* and is easier to handle in captivity.

FIGURE 2. Threat pose of *O. microlepidotus*



Discussion:

O. microlepidotus has been collected from gibber plains, open downs, rat burrow areas and sand dunes. The main habitat preference appears to be the open flood plains of the Diamantina River and Coopers Creek. These are periodically flood and dry out, leaving a surface which contracts into a labyrinth of cracks. These provide shelter for both the Inland Taipan and its food animals.

During floods these areas are covered with flowing water and it is intriguing to speculate how *O. microlepidotus* and the food animals survive. Goyders Lagoon has been up to 65km wide during these times. As these flood plains dry out the cattle leave deep depressions in the soft surface as they move about. The environmental damage to the ground and the vegetation in this area due to grazing appears to be minimal, especially when compared with the devastation that has occurred around Coopers Creek. This possibly reflects commendable management by the owners.

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**SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE WOMA (*ASPIDITES RAMSAYI*)
IN CAPTIVITY**

Greg Fyfe, (VHS), Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory,
Ayers Rock, N.T.

Chris Harvey, (SAHG), 20 Crozier Terrace, Oaklands Park, S.A. 5046.

Abstract:

Six Womas were observed in captivity. A new feeding strategy is described. These snakes were found to be efficient burrowers and the implications of these findings are discussed.

Introduction:

Six Womas have been kept by us in captivity during 1979, 1980 and 1981 in order to observe the behaviour of these little studied pythons. Four specimens from the Northern Territory were collected, observed and released by Greg Fyfe. One of the South Australian specimens was collected by Chris Harvey, the other being from the South Australian Museum. Both of these snakes are being retained by Chris Harvey for study purposes.

Capture Details of the Observed Specimens:

One adult Woma (specimen 1) was captured at 10.00 hrs on the 19th April 1979, on a road side 3 km west of Ayers Rock in an area of sandhill desert, vegetated with tussock grasses, mulga and desert oaks. A large area of *Triodia* grassland was nearby. This specimen, released in September 1979, measured 1.6 metres in length and was missing the last 6 cm of tail.

Two sub-adult Womas (specimens 2 and 3) were captured at 21.30 hrs in mid-November 1979, in a trench 15 km north-west of Ayers Rock. The capture site was a large sand plain between sandhills and the vegetation was tussock grass,