

A statement for the purposes of approved conservation advice
(s266B of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*)

Approved Conservation Advice for
Lerista vittata (Mount Cooper Striped Lerista)

This Conservation Advice has been developed based on the best available information at the time this conservation advice was approved.

Description

Lerista vittata, Family Scincidae, also known as the Mount Cooper Striped Lerista, is a pale grey or grey-brown reptile growing to 6.5 cm with faint darker brown flecks on the head and back, and a broad, dark brown side stripe extending from the eye to the tail tip (Cogger, 2000). Forelimbs are absent and the small hindlimbs have one digit. The tails of both juveniles and sub-adults are flushed with orange (Cogger, 2000; EPA, 2007).

Conservation Status

The Mount Cooper Striped Lerista is listed as **vulnerable**. This species is eligible for listing as vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cwlth) (EPBC Act) as, prior to the commencement of the EPBC Act, it was listed as vulnerable under Schedule 1 of the *Endangered Species Protection Act 1992* (Cwlth). The Mount Cooper Striped Lerista is also listed as vulnerable under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Queensland).

Distribution and Habitat

The Mount Cooper Striped Lerista is endemic to Queensland, occurring only in a small area around Mt Cooper Station, near Charters Towers (Cogger, 2000; EPA, 2007). Only four museum specimens have been collected from approximately 90 km south-east of Charters Towers (Cogger, 2000; DEW, 2007; EPA, 2007).

The Mount Cooper Striped Lerista is known to inhabit low closed forest and woodlands (Cogger et al., 1993) with vine thickets, on soft sandy soils where it burrows into leaf litter and loose soil under logs. It is sometimes found in open patches of low vegetation that extend into adjacent woodland on heavier soils (Wilson & Knowles, 1988).

This species occurs within the Burdekin (Queensland) Natural Resource Management Region.

The distribution of this species overlaps with the 'Semi-evergreen vine thickets of the Brigalow Belt (North and South) and Nandewar Bioregions' EPBC Act-listed threatened ecological community.

Threats

The main identified threats to the Mount Cooper Striped Lerista include habitat loss from land clearing and thinning operations. Additional threats include inappropriate fire regimes and weed invasion that degrade the habitat (Cogger, 2000; DEW, 2007; EPA, 2007).

Research Priorities

Research priorities that would inform future regional and local priority actions include:

- More precisely assess population size, distribution, ecological requirements and the relative impacts of threatening processes.
- Identify key habitat throughout the Queensland Brigalow Belt bioregion and priority areas for conservation in local government regions and develop management guidelines to protect these areas on private and state-controlled land (EPA, 2007).
- Undertake targeted surveys in areas of known and potential habitat to determine the extent and possible conservation areas for the Mount Cooper Striped Lerista.

Regional and Local Priority Actions

The following priority recovery and threat abatement actions can be done to support the recovery of the Mount Cooper Striped Lerista.

Habitat Loss, Disturbance and Modification

- Identify populations of high conservation priority.
- Manage threats to areas of vegetation that contain populations/occurrences of the Mount Cooper Striped Lerista.
- Ensure chemicals or other mechanisms used to eradicate weeds do not have a significant adverse impact on the species.
- Ensure infrastructure or development activities in areas where the Mount Cooper Striped Lerista occurs do not adversely impact on known populations.
- Investigate formal conservation arrangements such as the use of covenants, conservation agreements or inclusion in reserve tenure.

Invasive Weeds

- Develop and implement a management plan for the control of weeds in the local region.
- Identify and remove weeds in the local area, which could become a threat to the Mount Cooper Striped Lerista, using appropriate methods.

Trampling, Browsing or Grazing

- Manage known sites on private property to ensure appropriate cattle and/or sheep grazing regimes.
- Prevent grazing pressure at known sites on leased crown land through exclusion fencing or other barriers.

Fire

- Develop and implement a suitable fire management strategy for the Mount Cooper Striped Lerista.
- Provide maps of known occurrences to local and state Rural Fire Services and seek inclusion of mitigative measures in bush fire risk management plans, risk register and/or operation maps.

Conservation Information

- Develop media campaigns and education material to raise public awareness of this species and other priority reptile species in Queensland (EPA, 2007).

Establishing Additional Populations

- Undertake appropriate seed collection and storage.
- Investigate options for linking, enhancing or establishing additional populations.

This list does not necessarily encompass all actions that may be of benefit to the Mount Cooper Striped Lerista, but highlights those that are considered to be of highest priority at the time of preparing the conservation advice.

Existing Plans/Management Prescriptions that are Relevant to the Species

- Draft national recovery plan for Queensland Brigalow Belt Reptiles (in prep).

Information Sources:

Cogger, H 2000, *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia*, 6th edn, Reed New Holland, Sydney.

Cogger, HG, Cameron, EE, Sadler, RA & Egger, P 1994, *The Action Plan for Australian Reptiles*, Department of the Environment and Water Resources, viewed 11 March 2008, <<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/action/reptiles/index.html>>.

This conservation advice was approved by the Minister / Delegate of the Minister on: 26/3/2008

Department of the Environment and Water Resources (DEW) 2007, *Lerista vittata*, In Species Profile and Threats Database, viewed 11 March 2008, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon_id=1308>.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 2007, *Mount Cooper Striped Lerista*, viewed 11 March 2008, <http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/nature_conservation/wildlife/az_of_animals/mount_cooper_striped_lerista/>.

Wilson, SK & Knowles, DG 1988, *Australia's Reptiles: A Photographic Reference to the Terrestrial Reptiles of Australia*, Collins Publishers, Australia.