

**Approved Conservation Advice for
Niveoscincus palfreymani (Pedra Branca skink)**

(s266B of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*)

This Conservation Advice has been developed based on the best available information at the time this Conservation Advice was approved; this includes existing plans, records or management prescriptions for this species.

Description

Niveoscincus palfreymani (Pedra Branca skink), Family Scincidae, also known as the red-throated skink, is a moderately large and strongly built skink with well-developed limbs, a stout tail and smooth dorsal scales. The skinks vary in the intensity of colour and patterning. Adults can be grey, green or glossy black. Juveniles are light-tan, darkening on maturity. The head is variegated and spotted. A thin, light-coloured, dorso-lateral stripe exists in some specimens. There is a mid-lateral line apparent from behind the eye to the hind leg and below this the flanks are dark with scattered pale or bronze flecks. The ventral surface is grey with a tan to reddish tone. The adult males and females are similar in size with a mean snout–vent length of 88 mm and a mass of 17.7 g (Brothers and Pemberton, 1997). This species was previously known as *Pseudomoia palfreymani* (Cogger, 2000).

Conservation Status

The Pedra Branca skink 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 Pedra Branca skink is also listed as endangered under the Tasmanian *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*.

Distribution and Habitat

The Pedra Branca skink is found only on Pedra Branca Island, south of the Tasmanian mainland. Pedra Branca skinks occupy holes under boulders, deep crevices, or catacombs in weathering sandstone. The combined area of habitat used is approximately 700 m² (TSU, 2001), with the total available habitat approximately 1400 m² (Cogger et al., 1993). There is a single population of six ‘colonies’, with the last population estimate available (in 2000) being 470 individuals. During the period from 1986 to 1996, the population appears to have undergone a decline (49%) followed by recovery of numbers (TSU, 2001). More recent population size or trend information is not available.

This species occurs within the Tasmanian Southern Ranges Bioregion and the South (Tas) Natural Resource Management Region. Pedra Branca Island is part of the Southwest Tasmania World Heritage Area.

The distribution of this species is not known to overlap with any EPBC Act-listed threatened ecological community.

Although *Niveoscincus palfreymani* is included in survey guidelines prepared by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, access to Pedra Branca Island is restricted and there are Occupation Health and Safety issues regarding visits to the island, including for the purpose of surveying for this species.

Threats

The threats to Pedra Branca skink are not known. The main potential threats include the introduction of invasive species to Pedra Branca Island, changes to seabird numbers (increase in silver gulls and decrease in other seabirds such as Australasian Gannet), and climate change (sea level rise and/or increased frequency of extreme waves) (DPIPWE, 2009).

Priority Actions

The following priority recovery and threat abatement actions can be done to support the recovery of Pedra Branca skink.

- Long-term basic population monitoring including potential competitors/predators such as silver gulls (e.g. every few years).

Introduction of invasive predator/disease

- Monitor island for introduced predators.
- Maintain current access restrictions to Pedra Branca Island.
- If an introduced predator becomes established on the island, consider the need for and feasibility (including safety issues) of an eradication program, and implement if feasible.

Small, isolated single population

- Consider the need for and appropriateness of *ex situ* conservation, noting that a captive population would provide insurance against extinction.

This list does not necessarily encompass all actions that may be of benefit to Pedra Branca skink, but highlights those that are considered to be of highest priority at the time of preparing the Approved Conservation Advice.

Existing Plans/Management Prescriptions that are Relevant to the Species

Management of Pedra Branca Island is carried out in accordance with the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Management Plan (PWS, 1999). This Plan stipulates that access to Pedra Branca Island is subject to the written permission of the Director of Parks & Wildlife.

These prescriptions were current at the time of publishing; please refer to the relevant agency's website for any updated versions.

Information Sources

Tasmanian Scientific Advisory Committee (2011)

References cited in the advice

Brothers N and Pemberton D (1997). Population changes and current status of the Pedra Branca skink. Internal report to the Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania.

Cogger H (2000). Reptiles and amphibians of Australia – sixth edition. Reed New Holland, Sydney.

Cogger H, Cameron E, Sadler R and Egger P (1993). The action plan for Australian reptiles. Australian Nature Conservation Agency, Canberra.

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) (2009). Pedra Branca Skink web page.

Viewed: 30/4/2012

This Conservation Advice was approved by the Minister on 29 Apr 2014

Available on the Internet at <http://www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/WebPages/BHAN-55JUAX?open>

Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) (1999). Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan. Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania.

Threatened Species Unit (TSU) (2001). Pedra Branca skink recovery plan. Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Hobart.