

Threatened

VERTEBRATES

of the Western Cape

ARMADILLO GIRDLED LIZARD



PHOTO: © Atherton de Villiers

COMMON NAME

Armadillo girdled lizard
Pantstergordelakkedis

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Ouroborus cataphractus

CONSERVATION STATUS

Vulnerable

IDENTIFICATION

This heavily-armoured, stocky lizard varies in colour from greyish brown to light yellowish brown. The underside is smooth and yellow with some dark brown markings. There are several rows of sharp heavy spines covering the back of the tail, which is not easily discarded as in many other lizards. The males and females are very similar and can reach an average total length of about 150-200 mm. This species has a characteristic defence behaviour: when they are in danger and cannot reach a crevice or rock crack to hide in, they will roll into a ball and bite their tail, protecting their softer underside. They can stay in this position for up to an hour.

HABITAT

These lizards are associated with rocky habitats in dry succulent karoo veld and in close proximity to termite mounds (termites are an important food source – see below). They shelter in rock crevices.

LIFE HISTORY

These relatively slow-moving lizards are very shy and quick to hide when approached. They were thought to be only sit-and-wait feeders, but studies have shown that most of their stomach contents consist of termites. These termite mounds are often far from their crevices, and they must therefore move distances of between 4–20 m to find this food source. These lizards are strict rock-dwellers and live in horizontal crevices. They are social animals and form family groups of up to 60 individuals in one crevice. Once a year in autumn, the female gives birth to one relatively big baby.

DISTRIBUTION

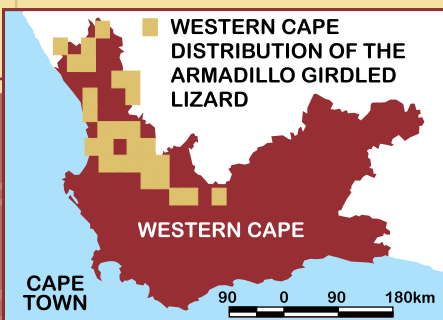
Armadillo lizards are endemic to the mountains and rocky hills of the Succulent Karoo region of western South Africa from the Orange River southwards to north of Porterville and eastwards to west of Laingsburg.

THREATS

Poor land management can lead to habitat degradation and loss. Because they live in family groups and are relatively easy to catch, the international illegal reptile pet trade is an additional threat.

CONSERVATION

- This species is protected under the Nature Conservation Ordinance of the Western Cape Province and is on Schedule II of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
- Various studies on the biology and ecology of this species by the University of Stellenbosch contribute to their conservation management.
- Strict law enforcement and public awareness is required to stop illegal trade in this species.



www.capenature.co.za

FURTHER READING

Alexander, G. and Marais, J. 2007. A Guide to the Reptiles of South Africa. Struik Publishers, Cape Town.
Branch, B. 1998. Field guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Southern Africa. Struik Publishers (Pty) Ltd. Cape Town.
Mouton, P. le F. N. 1988. *Cordylus cataphractus*: species account. In: Branch, W. R., ed., South African Red Data Book- Reptiles and Amphibians. pp.81-82. South African National Scientific Programmes report no.151.