

MONITORING THE ARNHEM ROCK SKINK TO TRACK TRAJECTORY

PROJECT FACTSHEET

The challenge

The Arnhem rock skink (*Bellatorias obiri*) is considered to be the Australian reptile most likely to go extinct in the next 20 years. It lives in rocky crevices and ledges of the Arnhem Plateau and is listed as Endangered by both the Australian and Northern Territory governments. It's also a priority species in the Australian Government's *Threatened species action plan 2022–2032*. However, not much is known about this threatened lizard. To protect it, we need to know more about where it lives and how many of them there are.

Project goals

This project builds on previous successful research undertaken in 2022–23 that established the best camera trapping methods to find Arnhem rock skinks in places they hadn't been seen in decades. It's a collaborative monitoring and research program aimed at establishing a baseline understanding of the distribution and abundance of the Arnhem rock skink.

This project will:

- coordinate surveys across the Arnhem Plateau to assess the skink's distribution, population size, habitat requirements, and genetic health;
- develop a species distribution model that will guide future survey efforts, investigate potential threats, and inform conservation strategies; and
- produce a detailed project report to inform future monitoring programs and conservation efforts.

Working together

The survey sites will be chosen in consultation with Traditional Owners and surveys will be conducted in collaboration with Warddeken Land Management, Jawoyn Land Management, Njanjma



Rangers (Northern Land Council), Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory Government, Macquarie University, Curtin University, and Charles Darwin University.

The project will use established camera trap methods to find the skinks, and complementary live trapping to assess population health through genetic samples. Camera traps will target the kinds of rock crevices where the skinks live. We'll also collect additional habitat data at the camera trap stations to give more information on the skinks' habitat preferences – this will help people to know where else to look for them.

This project will run from June 2024 to June 2026.



Territory Natural Resource Management
Working together to protect the Arnhem rock skink



Making a difference

Expanding our knowledge of the skink's current distribution and status will help address crucial knowledge gaps, especially around its distribution, population size, habitat requirements, and genetic health. This will help inform ongoing monitoring programs to help track the population trajectory and identify and manage threats (such as fire and feral animals).



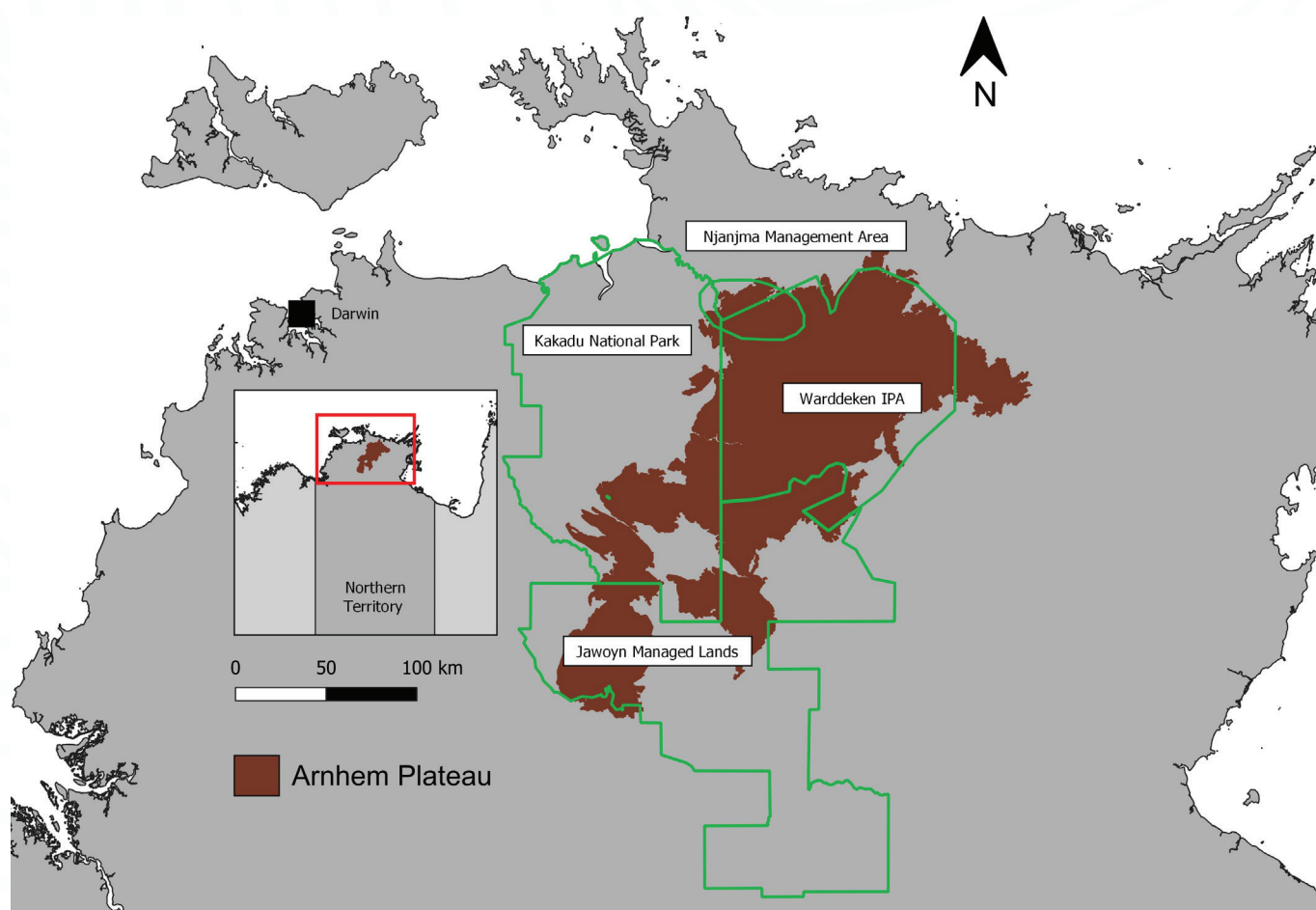
Next steps

Over the 2024–25 wet season, camera trap surveys will be conducted across the Arnhem Plateau. Surveys will occur at new sites and at historic locations not surveyed during the previous project to find Arnhem rock skinks in as many locations as possible.

Territory NRM ecologists and the Njanjma Rangers have already deployed 35 cameras within the Njanjma management area, and camera deployment in Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area is scheduled for the end of November 2024.

The initial consultation and planning stages are underway with Kakadu National Park, Jawoyn Rangers, and Traditional Owners.

The camera trapping data we gather this wet season will be used to inform the 2025–26 field work, which will involve trapping live animals to collect tissue samples for genetic analysis and a second round of camera trap surveys.



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