



Lerista punctatovittata



Anomalopus brevicollis

Burrowing Skinks *Lerista* species and *Anomalopus* species

What do they look like? Small, smooth and glossy lizards, 10 cm to 25 cm in total length, sometimes confused with blind snakes or even worms. Shades of grey to brown, sometimes with a dark stripe along the side. Some burrowing skinks have no limbs, whilst others have two or four tiny legs.

Where do they live? Burrowing skinks are found in woodlands throughout the region. They prefer sandy soils with ample leaf litter.

What do they need to live, eat and breed? Burrowing skinks spend much of their time in loose, top surface soil, leaf litter, under rocks and decaying logs. Some species are known to eat termites, and all probably eat a wide variety of small soil insects. They lay eggs deep under ground, under logs, in ant and termite nests.

When might I see (or hear) them? Rarely seen unless you actively search for them, or encounter them when moving logs or clearing fence lines. Domestic cats sometimes bring them in to houses and this is when most people would see them. In sandy country, they travel over the soil surface at night, leaving distinctive s-shaped tracks.

What management actions affect this species? Changes to the ground layer, leaf litter and top soil by clearing, ploughing or sowing with introduced pasture, severely reduces burrowing skink numbers. One species that occurs near Clermont, *Lerista allanae*, has the dubious distinction of being Australia's only suspected extinct reptile. Broad scale clearing, ploughing and seeding buffel has caused its disappearance. Maintaining healthy, uncompacted soil condition with dense leaf litter protects these animals. Retain windrows of intact, native vegetation between cropped paddocks.

How do they benefit the land I manage? These small, litter dwelling reptiles can occur in large numbers in suitable habitat. Like worms, they act as tiny ecosystem engineers in the top soil, aerating the soil and litter, helping mix in nutrients and water. They also feed on litter insects and larvae, keeping insect populations in check.

Similar species: Numerous similar species occur in the region. *Lerista fragilis*, *L. punctatovittata* and *L. zonulata* are the most common and widely distributed. *Anomalopus brevicollis* is common in the south of the region.

