

Reptiles



Ngiyari, thorny devil

CREDIT: Tourism Australia

Reptiles and amphibians play an important role in Anangu Tjukurpa. The stories of Kuniya (woma python) and Liru (poisonous snake) are two of the main Tjukurpa stories here at Uluru.

Tjukurpa

The Cultural Centre building was designed around the Tjukurpa story of Kuniya and Liru, and from an aerial view, the shape of the buildings represent these two reptiles.

Visit the Cultural Centre to learn more about these stories.

Species found in the park

The park is rich in reptiles of high conservation significance and new conservation areas exist in semi-arid zones.

To date, 77 species of reptiles and amphibians are recorded; 60 lizards, 13 species of snakes and four frog species. Also found in the park are tiny geckos and skinks, legless lizards, dragons and large goannas – including the second largest in the world named ngintaka (perentie, *Varanus giganteus*), which can grow up to 2.5 metres in length.

Most reptiles are opportunistic feeders and hunt and forage in a number of different habitats including open space, sand dunes and rocky outcrops. Species with higher body temperatures are more active during the day, compared to those with lower body temperatures, which are active at night and in winter.

Reptiles

A unique Central Australian lizard is the ngiyari (thorny devil, *Moloch horridus*). This lizard has an unusual way to drink water. Narrow grooves separate the scales of the skin forming a continuous network toward its mouth. Capillary action channels water from puddles up and over its body to reach the mouth.

The park is home to two non-venomous snake species – woma (*Aspidites ramsayi*), and Stimsons python (*Liasis stimsoni*).

Eight snake species are venomous, two of which are considered extremely dangerous.

The walalara (western brown, also called liru) grows up to 1–1.5 metres in length and has colourings from rusty brown, to black with orange bands.

Snakes are usually shy but can move extremely quickly across the ground.

When upset and getting ready to strike, the liru will lift its head to make an 's' shape with its forebody.

Matjanypa (mulga, or king brown, *Pseudonaja australia*, also called liru) are common in the park. Slow moving but highly defensive, this snake is found across many parts of Australia.

The mulga snake has the largest recorded venom output of any snake in the world. Although looking like, and being named a brown snake, it is technically a member of the black snake family.

Geckos and other reptiles have the ability to co-exist. In some areas records show as many as nine different species found living closely together. Some geckos are arboreal, or tree climbers. Some are found within spinifex clumps and others forage only in open spaces.

Several species of reptiles are used traditionally as bush food. The most common are tinka (sand goanna) and ngintaka (perentie)



Perentie



Water-holding frog



Bush foods

Several species of reptiles are traditional bush foods. The two most common are tinka (sand goanna) and ngintaka (perentie). Tinka are often hunted and dug out of burrows for their meat and eggs, both of which are a common food source. Ngintaka is a highly sought after bush food and considered a delicacy.

Frogs

Surprisingly, we have four species of frogs and toads in the park which are well adapted to desert life. They bury themselves deep in the sand at a depth where the temperature is constant. When the rain is heavy enough to soak down to where they have burrowed, they know that the waterholes and creeks are full. They will then emerge, often in vast numbers, to breed. After breeding they bloat themselves full of water and bury below the sand again. In very dry and desperate times, Anangu would dig up and squeeze the water out of frogs for a drink.

Frogs that inhabit the desert are known as 'water-holding' frogs and generally have a broad head, bulbous body and short limbs, with structures called metatarsal tubercles, which are like little spades, on the under surface of the feet to aid digging.

Frogs require water to survive so are often seen with their bodies flattened out against any moist surface. Spaces between the cells of their ventral skin develop an increasingly negative pressure as water is lost and this pressure then pulls water from the skin into the body.

Frogs are opportunistic feeders and will eat what resources are available at the time. Their diets include mainly ants and termites but also beetles, flies, spiders, grasshoppers and moths.

Threatened species

Threatened species listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* include Tjakuṛa (great desert skink, *Liopholis kintorei*) listed as vulnerable.

This species is mostly restricted to the transitional sand plain system.

The Central Land Council ranger group takes on Tjakuṛa as their namesake.

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MAY • 2021