BREEDING RECORD OF THE DELICATE SKINK *LEIOLOPISMA DELICATA* IN SOUTHERN TASMANIA

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On 14 February 1986 we collected 53 eggs of the Delicate Skink *Leiolopisma delicata* from an area of 2x1m next to the oval of Blackmans Bay Primary School. The eggs were in at least 11 clusters containing 3-5 eggs each. The nests were found exposed when large chunks, about 1m high, of the bank of a storm water creek had cracked off after heavy rain. The nests were about 20cm above the level of the creek and about 1.5m away. The bank was almost pure clay and hard. Near some of the nests the clay was moist and softer.

Most of the 53 eggs collected were entirely dried out but 18 were still firm and full. Egg lengths varied from 0.9 to 1.3cm with their shape differing from elongated to more round. A few were cut open and the contents thought to be Three-lined Skinks *Leiolopisma trilineata* because of their dark sides.

At the time of collection, about 2.30pm, no *L. delicata* or *L. trilineata* were seen near the next site although some skinks, believed to be Metallic Skinks *L. metallica,* were observed.

The eggs were placed in a small aquarium on an electric pet blanket, in moist soil kept at 26-33°C. Five of the 18 good eggs hatched and were confirmed to be *L. delicata.* The first two hatched on 22 February 1986, the next two on 6 March 1986 and the final one on 8 March 1986. The eggs after the lizards had hatched had a small hole in the shell with some liquid coming out when squeezed.

The lizards were uniform brown above with the tail being darker. The sides were also darker fading into light to medium grey underneath. Their lengths at birth were about 32mm. They were fed a variety of small insects scooped from tall grass with a net. By 16 June 1986 two had grown to 45 and 48mm respectively. A third had not grown so fast and lost part of its tail, measuring 32mm only. The remaining two hatchlings could not be found and had probably died.

By 16 June 1986 it was clear that we could no longer find enough food for the lizards, so they were killed and submitted to the Queen Victoria Museum in Launceston, and allocated Reg. No. 1986/3/41.

Green (1981) described the known distribution of *L. delicata* in Tasmania, and gave Hobart as the southernmost known record. The breeding site at Blackmans Bay (43°00' 147°19') thus becomes the most southerly recorded locality for the species.

Acknowledgement

We thank Mr. David Rounsevell of the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service for confirming the identification of the 3 specimens.

References

Green, R.H. 1981. Distribution of the Delicate Skink. *Tasmanian Naturalist 68:*8.

BOOK REVIEWS

Sex in Nature

by Chris Catton and James Gray
Published by Croom Helm, London and Sydney, 1985, 224pp.
Recommended Retail Price $32.50
Reviewed by D.A. Ratkowsky

This profusely illustrated book, containing excellent colour and black-and-white photographs, provides a good introduction to the role that sex plays in the reproduction of species in the natural world. Although the book is heavily biased towards animal sexual behaviour, plants and 'primitive' life forms do get a mention. The book is divided into ten chapters, the first of which deals with asexual reproduction which is characteristic of amoebae, algae, bacteria and other simple organisms. The multifarious ways sperm and egg can unite is the subject of the second chapter. Chapter 3 is devoted to the various ways natural creatures hunt for a partner, utilizing sight, sound and smell, and Chapter 4 deals with the mechanisms that have evolved to improve their chances of finding a mate. The fifth chapter considers the development of self-fertilisation, hermaphrodism and parthenogenesis which render unnecessary the search for a mate. Ritual courtship and mating success is the subject of the sixth chapter. In Chapter 7, one finds a section on fighting amongst males for dominance, and a description of the various ways males try to maximise their reproductive success. The eighth chapter considers the female point of view, detailing the means at their disposal for trying to guarantee that their genes will be passed on to the next generation. The relatively length Chapter 9 deals with parenthood, and the final chapter is devoted to human sexuality.

Australian content in this book includes photographs of the fawn-breasted bower bird, red kangaroos fighting, the superb lyrebird and drawings of Aboriginal rock paintings.

The description on the jacket maintains that the book, "although aimed primarily at the amateur interested in natural history, should also prove useful to more serious students". Anyone who has wondered why some animals produce lavish numbers of eggs when others are sparing, why some plants and animals are brilliantly coloured whereas others are drab, why some animals exist in large family groups whereas others are solitary, will find answers to these questions in this book.