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NOTES ON *VARANUS BREVICAUDA*

By ERIC R. PIANKA, Department of Zoology, University of
Texas, Austin, Texas, 78712, U.S.A.

Varanus brevicauda (Fig. 1), the smallest of all known goannas, was described and figured by Boulenger in 1898. The type and paratype were collected on the Sherlock River in north-western Western Australia. Until 1964, when K. R. Slater collected a specimen from the Tanami desert in the Northern Territory, this species was thought to be restricted to the North-west (Glauert, 1923, 1961). In 1967 my wife, Helen, and myself further extended the known range to include the Lake Carnegie region of central Western Australia.

There are only 20 known specimens of this rare pygmy goanna, listed below: (BMNH = British Museum of Natural History, SMF = Senckenberg Museum, ERP = my personal col-



Fig. 1.—An adult male *Varanus brevicauda* from 9 miles NNE of Millrose homestead, W.A. In life, the iris is an orange-red colour. Dorsally, the lizard is a pale reddish-brown with flecks of darker brown, ventrally cream coloured. The short stout tail, a diagnostic character of this species, is extremely muscular. It is almost always slightly shorter than the snout to vent length. Snout-vent length ranges from 65 to 120 mm.

lection*, WAM=Western Australian Museum, and NTM=Northern Territory Museum.)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA: BMNH 98.10.26.6-7 (1946.8.30.46-47) (Sherlock River, Nicol Bay); SMF 51778 (Carnarvon District); ERP M11716 (9 miles NNE of Millrose HS); ERP D 11955 (21 miles West of Lorna Glen HS); ERP 9845b (80 mile Beach, Lat. 19° 06'S, Long. 121° 38'E); WAM R 1023-5 (Wallal, W.A.); WAM R 2124 (De Grey Station); WAM 12622 ($\frac{1}{2}$ mile beyond Abydos Station on road to Port Hedland); WAM R 13837 (Derby); WAM R 14915 (Mundabullangana); WAM R 16884 (18 miles East of Ningaloo); WAM R 16876 (Ningaloo); WAM R 20350 (20 miles SE Derby); WAM R 28029 (La Grange); WAM R 29118 (Roebourne); WAM R 29768 (10 miles SE of "Urella HS"; probably Urala Homestead).

NORTHERN TERRITORY: NTM (Tanami Wildlife Sanctuary, Lat. 20° 35'S, Long. 130° 32-1/4'E).

Fig. 2 is a spot map showing the approximate locations of collection (closed circles).

So little is known about *Varanus brevicauda* that it seems appropriate to enumerate the few facts which have been established. K. R. Slater (1964) indicates that the Northern Territory

* Now deposited in the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.

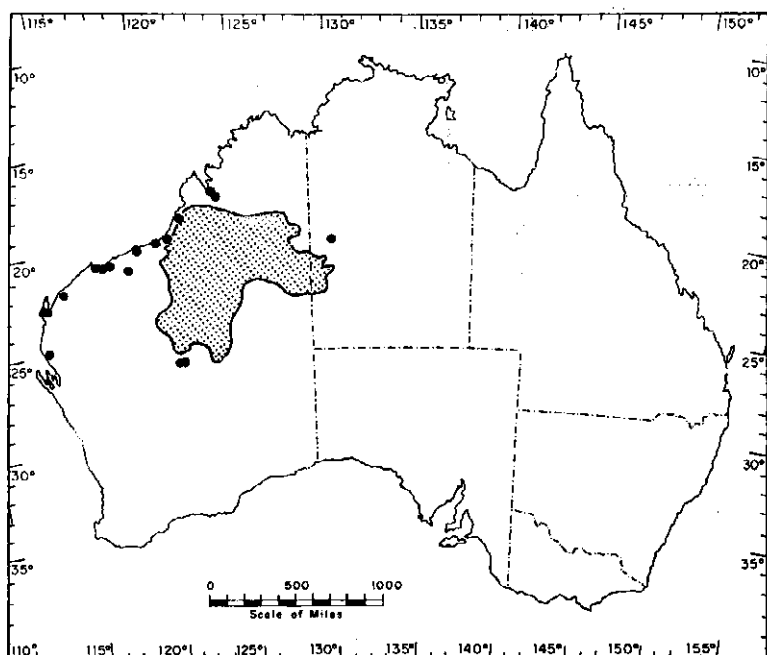


Fig. 2.—Recorded localities of collection of *V. brevicauda*. The approximate extent of the Great Sandy Desert is indicated by stippling.

specimen "was seen to run from one *Triodia* clump to another, and it was dug from a hole in the pedestal of this plant." Two of the specimens in my collection were dug from fairly shallow holes in spinifex country (the third, ERP 9845b, was taken from the stomach of a *Varanus gouldi*). One area is a mixed *Acacia-Eucalyptus-Triodia* habitat on a sandplain; the other is a sandplain-sand dune habitat dominated by *Triodia*. The specimen from the latter area was taken on a flat sandplain portion of the area with a vegetation consisting almost entirely of spinifex. The preceding observations on its habitat requirements suggest that *Varanus brevicauda* may well be found to be a widespread desert lizard; perhaps its geographical distribution includes most of the Great Sandy Desert. Indeed, this appears to be by far the most probable route by which the recorded localities could be linked. This species appears to be terrestrial, rather than arboreal, in its habits. There is a suggestion that it either digs its own burrow or has a "home burrow."

Dr. G. M. Storr kindly allowed me to examine the gonads and stomach contents of the 13 specimens in the Western Australian Museum. Table 1 lists the food items recorded. The average size of these 13 prey items is fairly large (0.41 cc.); the largest item being a 1.5 cc. grasshopper. One adult female contained 2 large reptile eggs about 15 mm. long in her stomach.

There are only 10 dates of collection, but of these five were collected during the month of August with one during each of the following months: September, October, December, February and May. This suggests that *brevicauda* may be highly seasonal in its

TABLE 1.—STOMACH CONTENTS OF 15 VARANUS BREVICAUDA; 6 OF THE 15 STOMACHS WERE EMPTY. VOLUMES MEASURED IN CC.

FOOD ITEM	NUMBER	VOLUME	FREQUENCY
Grasshoppers	4	2.1	26.7
Roaches	1	0.1	6.7
Beetles	1	0.5	6.7
Reptile Eggs	2	2.0	6.7
Caterpillars	2	0.3	6.7
Isopods (?)	2	0.1	6.7
Unidentified Insects	1	0.2	6.7
TOTALS	13	5.3	

activity. Of the 7 males dissected, the largest testes occur during August. One female contained two large oviducal eggs; unfortunately there is no date of collection with this specimen.

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