

## AN OBSERVATION OF COPULATION BY GARDEN SKINKS, *LAMPROPHOLIS DELICATA*

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At 1300 h in sunny weather on 13 April 2002, we found a pair of garden skinks copulating in our suburban backyard (Hunters' Hill, 33°49'S 151°08'E) in Sydney. The two animals were stationary when seen, on the ground in a protected nook at the base of a stone wall. The male was slightly larger than the female, and was biting her above the right forelimb, with his body curled around above her to her left. Unusually, they allowed us to approach close enough to easily capture both animals and confirm their sexes by manual eversion of hemipenes. Extensive experience shows that this method provides a reliable indication of the sex of small scincid lizards (e.g., Shine & Elphick, 2001).

Remarkably, we are unaware of any previous published reports of copulation by *Lampropholis delicata*. The only detailed data on reproduction in Sydney *L. delicata* come from Joss and Minard (1985), who reported that females produce a single clutch of eggs each year in November-December. These authors attributed the disappearance of sperm from the seminiferous tubules of adult males in spring and again in autumn as due to mating at these times, but observed mating only in late summer. Our observation corroborates their prediction of autumn mating in this species, and confirms the probable role of sperm storage through winter. Autumn mating with sperm storage overwinter is widespread in skinks from southern Australia (Greer, 1989), including populations of *Lampropholis guichenoti* from the Brindabella Range near Canberra (Pengilly, 1972) and the Armidale region (Simbotwe, 1985). Presumably, Sydney *L. delicata* also mate in spring, and may mate in summer as well in circumstances (areas and years) when females are able to produce more than a single clutch within the same active season (Forsman & Shine, 1996).

The most interesting aspect of this observation is that it appears to be the first published record

of mating in the field for a species that is abundant in most suburban gardens throughout Sydney. Presumably, hundreds of people see these lizards mating every year but do not regard the observation as worthy of reporting. As a result, basic parameters of the biology of even the most abundant lizards in Australia remain virtually unknown. We exhort amateur herpetologists to record such information, and to publish it so that it is available to others.

### REFERENCES

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