

# HERPETOLOGICAL NOTES

## ORNAMENTAL PLANT TRAPS LIZARD

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Suburban gardens contain a diverse array of non-Australian plant species, some of which may pose potential dangers to native fauna. We encountered such a case on 6 May 2002, when an adult garden skink (*Lampropholis delicata*) was found in the grounds of the University of Sydney, with its head firmly wedged inside the dried seed-cap of an ornamental plant "Lassiandra" (*Tibouchina* 'Alstonville'). This plant produces bright purple flowers and is widespread in Sydney gardens. The lizard (adult female, 40.5 mm snout-vent length, 76 mm total length, mass 0.89 g) had its entire head wedged into the hard, dry seed-cap (11.9 mm long, 8.7 mm wide). The seed-cap was slightly flattened, perhaps as a result of being stepped on by a student. Whatever the

process, the result was that the cap's inwards-projecting flange became tightly wedged around the lizard's neck (Fig. 1). We had to cut the cap to release the lizard, and it seems likely that the animal would have faced a lingering death without this intervention. We have seen similar problems with snakes and lizards caught by the head in wire fences, discarded beer and soft-drink cans, or plastic packaging materials. However, this is the first time we have seen a lizard trapped by a plant. It emphasises the subtle and diverse ways in which human interference and especially, introduction of exotic species, can pose dangers to native animals.

**Figure 1. Adult garden skink (*Lampropholis delicata*) trapped by the dried seed-cap of an ornamental plant.**

