



Farming for dragons

Productive landscapes can protect the
Bathurst grassland earless dragon

Saving our Species
in partnership with
Grassland Earless Dragon Alliance
Central Tablelands Local Land Services





Bathurst grassland earless dragon (right) pictured next to Canberra grassland earless dragon.
Photo: Will Osborne

Bathurst grassland earless dragon

Tympanocryptis mccartneyi
Critically endangered

Dragons on farms

Having dragons on your land is a healthy country indicator. Their presence is a sign that the land is healthy and well-managed.

In well-managed native grasslands, dragons can thrive right alongside sustainable livestock grazing.



Bathurst grassland earless dragon
(Gavin Waters/DCCEEW)

What is the Bathurst grassland earless dragon?

The Bathurst grassland earless dragon (*Tymanocryptis mcartneyi*) is unique to the Bathurst region and found nowhere else in the world. It is one of Australia's least known reptiles and one of its most endangered. The genus name *Tymanocryptis* means 'hidden eardrum', and the name *mcartneyi* refers to the species' namesake Ian McCartney, a local Wiradjuri man who first identified the species at George Park in Bathurst.

The Bathurst grassland earless dragon is known only from a few historical records around Bathurst. It was last spotted in the 1990s, however the recent rediscovery of the Victorian grassland earless dragon (after no sightings for 50 years) has renewed hope that the Bathurst grassland earless dragon can be rediscovered.

You can tell dragons apart from other lizards by their distinctive rough, scaly skin and defined head. They are roughly the length of a smartphone – up to 16 cm long including their tail, and identifiable by the distinctive 3 thin white lines running along their patterned light-and-dark back.


They have no external ear openings, but instead have a hidden eardrum.

They are a 'sit and wait' predator, feeding on grassland insects like ants, beetles and grasshoppers.

Where do they live?

It has been nearly 30 years since the last recorded sighting in Bathurst, but the Bathurst grassland earless dragon is also thought to inhabit surrounding regions. They live in native grasslands and have been described as a 'Goldilocks species', preferring some native grass cover but not too much. They thrive in paddocks containing rock cover and open space between grass tussocks as these habitat features allow them to bask in the sun.

Grassland earless dragons shelter beneath rocks, in cracks in the soil, under grass tussocks (during summer) and, often, in wolf spider burrows, so they are most likely to be found in paddocks that have not been ploughed as soil disturbance can remove these features. They don't travel far in their lifetime, generally staying within 100 m of their burrows.

A wide-angle photograph of a grassland landscape. The foreground is filled with tall, dry, yellowish-brown grass tussocks growing in patches of reddish-brown soil. A large, flat, light-colored rock is prominent in the lower center. In the background, the landscape extends to a flat horizon under a clear sky, with more distant tussocks and rocks visible.

Grassland earless dragon habitat, containing tussock-forming grasses and rocks.
Photo: Matthew Clancy/DCCEEW



Grassland earless dragon in burrow.
Photo: Matthew Clancy/DCCEEW

Why are they threatened?

Many of the native grasslands in the region have been significantly modified and fragmented, and no longer provide the habitat needed for the Bathurst grassland earless dragon to survive and thrive. This unique animal struggles to survive pasture improvement, fertiliser application, ploughing and rock removal.

How can you help?

- Retain areas of native pasture
- Identify areas of your farm that are dragon-friendly
- Manage stocking rates and timing to maintain suitable grassland condition – so this ‘Goldilocks’ species can enjoy tussock cover that is not too low and not too high
- Allow rocks to remain in paddocks
- Where possible, limit activities that may disturb the dragons (such as machinery use) during their breeding season (November to March)
- Spread the word – tell your friends and neighbours about the search for the Bathurst grassland earless dragon
- Consider hosting surveys for the Bathurst grassland earless dragon to help rediscover this critically endangered species

Is there support to look after dragon habitat?

Dragon-friendly farming is an opportunity to improve management of native biodiversity alongside agricultural production. Caring for biodiversity on your property can open up opportunities in emerging sustainability markets.

Local Land Services can provide support and advice on grazing, ground cover management and dragon habitat suitability. Local Land Services also offer support with natural resources management, natural capital, sustainable agriculture production, invasive species control, livestock health and biosecurity services.

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust offers a range of support options for landholders interested in conserving and managing biodiversity on private land.

Central Tablelands Local Land Services
(02) 6333 2300 (Bathurst office)

Photos

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(Gavin Waters/DCCEEW)

Published by:

Environment and Heritage,
Department of Climate Change,
Energy, the Environment and Water
Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124.
Phone: 1300 361 967;
Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au;
Website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au.

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