

# ZOOS VICTORIA'S PRIORITY SPECIES GRASSLAND EARLESS DRAGON

*Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*

Critically Endangered



One of Australia's most endangered reptiles, the last confirmed sighting of the Grassland Earless Dragon in Victoria was in 1969, with unconfirmed sightings continuing to 1990. Elusive and difficult to study, dragons may continue to survive in Victoria in low numbers. Confirmed populations are currently found in the ACT and adjoining areas in NSW. Living in open temperate grasslands, the Grassland Earless Dragon is threatened by habitat loss due to urban growth, changes in fire regime and introduced plant and animal species. Zoos Victoria is committed to determining the status of the Victorian population and securing a long term future for the species.





# Zoos Victoria is committed to Fighting Extinction

We are focused on working with partners to secure the survival of our priority species before it is too late.

\* Last sighted in 1969

With the Grassland Earless Dragon recorded at a limited number of locations within Australia, every population in the wild is considered crucial. A population persisting within Victoria would not only be a survival success but would assist in the long term conservation of the species.

As it is difficult to develop targeted conservation action without species distribution information, a critical step in the conservation of this species involves surveying probable locations of dragons based on suitable habitat in Victoria. Staff at Zoos Victoria will work alongside expert ecologists and local communities to foster widespread community support for and knowledge of the dragon, leading to further survey sites that may re-ignite hope of re-discovering the species in Victoria.

## KEY PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- + Determine the size and location of any surviving populations of Grassland Earless Dragons in Victoria.
- + Raise community awareness of the Grassland Earless Dragon throughout Victoria and engage the community to assist in the search for the species.
- + Undertake research into the genetic distinction between previous populations in Victoria and current populations throughout New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES TO DATE

- + Camera surveys were conducted during the summers of 2014-2016 throughout sites in Western Victoria, with more than 2 million images collected and viewed in that time. Unfortunately no images of Grassland Earless Dragons were recorded during these surveys.

## THE SPECIES

As their name suggests, the Grassland Earless Dragon is found in grasslands and lack external ear openings. They are typically light brown in colour, with three thin white stripes running down their body, and a number of darker bands running across the body.

Growing to a full length of 15 cm (nose to tail) they reach maturity within a few months.

These dragons are capable of breeding the year they are born and studies have indicated wild dragons may only reproduce once in their lifetime.

During winter, the dragon has been reported to spend time in torpor, however if conditions are warm enough they are capable of remaining active throughout the year.

## THE PLAN

Zoos Victoria has outlined three projects within the Wildlife Conservation Master Plan 2014-2019 and the Fighting Extinction Funding from the Victorian Government (2016-2018) to find out more about the status of the Grassland Earless Dragon in Victoria and to investigate future conservation actions to secure the future of the species.

- + Conduct research and carefully planned surveys to determine the status of the population throughout Victoria \$50,000
- + Take a new approach to surveying in Victoria through community engagement and awareness and investigate the possibility of a captive population in Victoria \$50,000
- + Undertake genetic research to determine whether Victorian populations are genetically distinct from populations in other states \$16,000
- + Total costs: \$116,000

## HOW CAN I HELP?

We are currently mobilising the community and developing survey methodology and mobilising the community to help inform future searches for the Grassland Earless Dragon in Victoria. You can support our Wildlife Conservation Master Plan 2014-2019 by donating at [zoo.org.au/donate](http://zoo.org.au/donate)



## PROGRAM PARTNERS

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning  
[delwp.vic.gov.au](http://delwp.vic.gov.au)

Corangamite Catchment Management Authority  
[ccma.vic.gov.au](http://ccma.vic.gov.au)

Melbourne Museum  
[museumvictoria.com.au/melbournemuseum/](http://museumvictoria.com.au/melbournemuseum/)

Arthur Rylah Institute  
[delwp.vic.gov.au/environment-and-wildlife/arthur-rylah-institute](http://delwp.vic.gov.au/environment-and-wildlife/arthur-rylah-institute)

## FIND OUT MORE

[zoo.org.au/conservation-plan](http://zoo.org.au/conservation-plan)

## IMAGES

FRONT The Grassland Earless Dragon and its unique colour markings and lack of ear openings. Photo: Peter Robertson.  
BACK TOP Camera traps in the Victorian grasslands are continuing the search. Photo: unknown.  
BACK LOWER The future of the Grassland Earless Dragon is in all of our hands. Photo: unknown.