

Oedura castelnaui

Elizabeth Schostakowski, 2001

Authority: Thominot, 1889

Common name: Northern Velvet Gecko

Description (Swan 1998; Bustard 1970; Gow and Swanson 1977; Cogger 2000): Velvet geckos have their name because of their soft velvety skin. The reason for their skin being soft is because their scales do not overlap each other. They have a relatively flat body and have a greatly distended tail. They tend to be deep purplish, almost brown above and usually have a series of pale white and yellow transverse bands starting at the snout and finishing near the vent. The pale bands usually contain dark brown coloured scales. The snout and the crown of the head are pale and match the first and sometimes the second pale bands. The first dark band tends to form a neck band across the nape of the neck and extends from eye to eye. These bands are generally more noticeable in the juveniles compared to the adults. They are generally found at around 90 mm in length and the maximum length that they can grow is 150 mm.

Similar species (Cogger 1975): *Oedura coggeri* are similar in appearance, ecology and distribution to *O. castelnaui*. They are similar in appearance having transverse bands in splotches down their back. They are found in the Cape York Peninsula, however they are more likely to be found under granite. However, like the *O. castelnaui* they can live under the bark of fallen trees and are nocturnal. *Oedura marmorata* have a wide distribution but is not found in the Northern Queensland area. They have a similar appearance and ecology to *O. castelnaui*. They generally have five or six bands running down their backs and this is more evident in juveniles like the *O. castelnaui*. They are aboreal and can be found sheltering in crevices or under the bark of fallen or standing trees. Like *O. castelnaui* they are nocturnal.

Range (Gow and Swanson 1977; Cogger 2000): The distribution of *O. Castelnaui* is confined to North-Eastern Queensland, particularly around Cape York Peninsula.

Ecology and behaviour (Bustard 1970; Cogger 2000; Gow and Swanson 1977; Swan 1998): *O. castelnaui* are typically aboreal, and are often found under bark of trees. They can also be found among natural and man-made debris that is on the ground. They have well developed sub-digital pads and are, therefore, excellent climbers. They are nocturnal and feed on insects, such as crickets or spiders and can eat smaller geckos. Their tail is used as a fat store. This is most valuable during hot, dry weather when metabolic activity remains high but food may be unavailable. Cogger (1957) discovered that if an animal is left without food it can last for about 9 months on its fat stores, as long as there is water present. However, if water is not present then the time it can survive is only about 2 months. If threatened, *O. castelnaui* raise their tails and slowly move them from one side to another, while keeping the rest of their body still. Advertising their tail and focusing attention away from their heads.

Breeding biology (Bustard 1967; Cogger 2000; Doughty 1997; Greer 1989): The *O. castelnaui* produce a maximum clutch size of two eggs per female. These are

parchment shelled eggs. The relative egg size is 0.22 – 0.39 grams, which can be 22.8% of the females body weight. In a study by Greer (1989), it was found that at an incubation temperature of 30°C, *O. castelnaui* eggs took about 60 days to hatch. This is a relatively quick incubation period compared to other gecko species. During incubation, due to water intake, the eggs increase in diameter, length and weight. The reproductive season of *O. castelnaui* is generally the period between spring and autumn.

Literature cited:

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