

Physignathus lesueurii

Kaori Maruyama and Tracy Langkilde, 1999 © 2001 James Cook University

Authority: Gray, 1831

Common Name: Eastern Water Dragon

Description (Wilson and Knowles 1988; Cogger 1996): The head is large and angular when viewed from above. The tympanum and canthus are both distinct. A dorsal crest extends from a point midway between the tympanic depressions to the tip of the tail, being most prominent in the nuchal region. This is a powerful and impressive lizard that grows to 20cm, with a strong long tail that grows to two and a half times the body length. The tail is compressed laterally as an aid to swimming. The limbs are well developed and pentadactyl.

Similar species (Wilson and Knowles 1988; Cogger 1996): Can be distinguished from all other dragons by having a strongly compressed tail with a strongly differentiated dorsal keel. There are 2 subspecies: *P. l. lesueuerii* which extends from central New South Wales to Cooktown, and *P. l. howittii* which extends from central New South Wales to Victoria.

Range (Cogger 1996): East coast of Australia from Eastern Victoria to Cape York Peninsula.

Ecology and behaviour (Wilson and Knowles 1988; Cogger 1996): Semiaquatic and arboreal. Adults prefers habitats near water and is often found in trees overhanging water from which it will drop into the water if disturbed, enabling it to escape. Juveniles prefer low vegetation near water. Powerful swimmer using their laterally compressed tails to propel them through the water while holding their limbs against their bodies to reduce drag. Can remain under water for up to 1 hour. Feeds on a wide variety of foods including aquatic insects, small terrestrial vertebrates and plant matter. They are territorial, and males will battle over territory rights. Males occupy an area of bank with a number of females. Juveniles aggregate separately.

Breeding biology (Wilson and Knowles 1988): Eggs are laid in burrows. Usually 6-18 eggs per clutch. Individuals may live up to 15 years.

Literature cited:

Cogger, H.G. 1996. *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia*. Reed Books, Chatswood, NSW.

Wilson, S.K. and Knowles, D.G. 1988. *Australia's reptiles. A photographic reference to the terrestrial reptiles of Australia*. Collins Publishers, Australia.