

THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN NATURALIST

Vol. 16

August 31, 1987

No. 8

THE MOVEMENT OF REPTILES IN MULGA FENCEPOSTS WITH RECORDS FROM ESPERANCE, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Mulga (*Acacia aneura*) has long been recognised as a hard pest resistant timber for fenceposts in areas where it occurs naturally. In recent years (late 1970's to present) it has also been used considerably on the Esperance coastal sandplain. As an example of this the property I am employed on, "Lort River Station", has over 50 kilometres of fence erected to date using mulga at 3 posts/chain, i.e. 7,500 posts at 1.8 metres or 13,500 metres of mulga.

The arid area dominated by mulga is separated from the Esperance sandplain by a 370 kilometre belt of eucalypt woodlands. Mulga is utilized by many semi-arboreal lizards that do not naturally occur on the coast near Esperance. However, I have collected several of these locally "exotic" reptiles from or in close proximity to mulga fencepost dumps on "Lort River Station".

Apparently the inadvertent transport of reptiles is quite common. Storr (pers. comm.) informed me that a large number of *Egernia depressa* are exported overseas in consignments of sandalwood (*Santalum spicatum*). Also, the Asian house gecko (*Hemidactylus frenatus*) found in parts of northern Australia may occur there as a result of being introduced by man (Cogger 1979).

At the time of writing this article lizards are the only reptiles I have recorded as being transported to the coast in mulga. However, there is equal opportunity for snakes to be conveyed this way also. The posts are stacked near the place of cutting and may remain this way for a few days to several weeks prior to being loaded for the trip south (Len Johnson, mulga cutter, pers. comm.). Many of these have hollows suitable for snakes to seek concealment in, therefore it is probable that snakes as well as lizards have been and will continue to be moved this way.

Reptile specimens collected on the southern coast that have not previously been recorded here but are known to occur in the Goldfields north of Comet Vale (the southern limit of mulga in this region) should be considered closely. Rather than representing distribution extensions they may be the result of the inadvertent introduction discussed above.

The 5 species I have recorded as being transported to the coast in mulga are as follows:

Gekkonidae

Gehyra variegata

Common on both standing and deadfall timber throughout the mulga dominated arid area south through much of the eucalypt woodlands to within 100 kilometres of the coast in this region. It is

by far the most common species I have recorded in the fenceposts. Because of its adaptability (suggested by its successful invasion of buildings further north) it may eventually become established here. However, to do this it must adjust to a much higher rainfall (600 v. 300mm/year) and successfully compete with its coastal ecological equivalent *Phyllodactylus marmoratus*.

Scincidae

Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus

As equally adaptable as the preceding species although unrecorded on the coast until 1982. Since then I have collected numerous specimens both at mulga fencepost dumps and on mulga posts erected along fencelines. This species appears to have become locally established only since the widespread use of mulga on the coast.

Egernia depressa

A saxicoline and arboreal species found south to Widgiemooltha in this region. It is more specialized in habitat requirements than both preceding species and, therefore, unlikely to become established on the coastal sandplain.

Egernia formosa

Both terrestrial and arboreal south to Norseman. As for *E.depressa*.

Varanidae

Varanus caudolineatus

Both arboreal and saxicoline in the mulga dominated arid areas. Unlikely to become established on the much wetter coastal sandplain.

REFERENCE

COGGER, H.G. 1979. *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia* (2nd edition). Reed, Sydney. pp. 159-60.