

The hunt for the Condamine Earless Dragon

Researchers have been surveying the paddocks of the Darling Downs looking for the Condamine earless dragon (*Tympanocryptis condaminensis*), as this is only place in the world that the endangered lizard can be found.

Dr April Reside from the University of Queensland (UQ) has been leading a team of researchers with the goal in mind of finding out where these dragons live and how many there are.

Boots on the ground has proved to be the most effective method so far, although a sniffer dog has

recently been added to the mix.

The Condamine earless dragon is six centimetres long from snout to vent (the base of its tail) and can be found in native grasslands, croplands and on the verges of roadsides.

The Threatened Species Recovery Hub, completed

in 2021, named the dragon as one of Australia's most imperilled snakes and lizards.

Dr Reside is a Senior Lecturer in Wildlife Science and has been supervising three Honours and one Masters students as part of the project.

She said the majority of their investigation has been in the areas around Brookstead, Oakey, Jondaryan, Cecil Plains and Dalby.

The Condamine earless dragon's habitat extends as far south as Clifton.

Dr Reside started working on finding more about the Condamine earless dragon in 2022 not long after moving to Queensland.

"I was interested in finding a local threatened species that might benefit from some research," Dr Reside said.

"There was not a whole lot of work on them when we started."

Dr Reside said there is still a lot to learn about the behaviour and habitat of the dragons.

"We want to know where in the Darling Downs the dragons are," she said.

"We want to know why they are in some paddocks and not others."

Where the dragons have been found they have been observed to be in healthy numbers.

Dr Reside said the cracking black clay soil might be the reason the dragon calls the Darling Downs home.

Interestingly, the species appears to be happily living amongst many types of crops including wheat, sorghum, maize and cotton.



A sub adult Condamine earless dragon (*Tympanocryptis condaminensis*).

Photo, Emilee Thomson



UQ researchers have employed the services of a sniffer dog to help find Condamine earless dragon.

Photo, Emilee Thomson

"We think some types of cropping is working for the dragons."

Dr Reside said searching for them can be laborious task.

While one person is driving a car extremely slowly down the road, their

passenger keeps their eyes peeled on the edge of crops looking for the Condamine earless dragon.

The dragons can often sense if there are people near them on foot, making walking while searching for them less effective.

"You roll forward and stare at the side of the road. It's surprisingly effective," Dr Reside said.

"It's a rush when you see a dragon but it does your head in when you search for hours on end and don't see a dragon."

"We do walk sometimes."

"When they see a car goes past, they don't necessarily see it as a threat."

The UQ team has recently introduced a new member of the team to help with the search - a sniffer dog named Evie.

"We're hoping the detector dog might help," Dr Reside said.

On the plus side when it comes to the dragon hunt, there is only one other

species it can possibly be confused with, which is the baby bearded dragon.

The baby bearded dragon doesn't stay small for long, and looks a bit different so once you know what you are looking for they can be easily discerned from one another.

Dr Reside said the project would not have been possible without the help of landholders.

"The landholders we have been working with have been so wonderful," she said.

"I've also been lucky to have a great team of students on the project and the dog handler and trainer - it's been a team effort."

In recent years the University of Southern Queensland has also begun a project that is looking into the Condamine earless dragon.

Have you spotted a Condamine earless dragon?

Let Dr Reside know by emailing her at a.reside@uq.edu.au

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