

From Field and Study

An additional record of Frilled Lizard (*Chlamydosaurus kingii*) from south of the Roebuck Plains, Western Australia

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The Frilled Lizard (*Chlamydosaurus kingii*) is a large iconic agamid with an extensive distribution in tropical woodlands extending east from Broome in the western Kimberley through the northern Northern Territory (NT) to western Queensland and then from the top of Cape York Peninsula south to the Brisbane area (Melville & Wilson 2019), apparently in association with the forested Great Dividing Range. It also occurs in southern New Guinea (Cogger 2018; OZCAM 2024).

On 20 January 2024 at about 8 am, while travelling on the Great Northern Highway (GNH), one of us (CL) observed a Frilled Lizard (Fig. 1) on the road 5.5 km SSW of the Goldwire 24-Hour Rest Area (-18.6432°, 121.9427°), and 82.5 km SSW of Broome. The temperature was approximately 29°C, the humidity 67% and the sky was primarily overcast with small intermittent patches of blue showing through the clouds.

A check on OZCAM suggests there are no museum records in Western Australia (WA) south of a line from Broome (-17.9618°) east through Mount Anderson homestead (-18.0333°), Halls Creek (-18.1337°) and 30 km north of

Nicholson homestead (-17.4003°) just west of the NT border. Bush (1985) reported the occurrence of this lizard slightly further south (-18.2503°) of this line in the western Kimberley when he stated that those he sighted were distributed: "... 20 kilometres northeast of Broome to 60 kilometres south of the Broome-GNH junction (to lat. 18°15'S)" (p. 53). However, the distances mentioned in his brief note were not in a straight line but recorded by road on his vehicle's trip meter. Therefore, the Broome Road junction to latitude 18°15'S is only about 44.4 km, well short of the 60 km he mentions. Furthermore, he added: "Only one of the eleven lizards observed was south of the Roebuck Plains" (p. 53).

Now, 40 years later, with the assistance of Google Earth Pro we have localised his observation of the one individual to the GNH 1.6 km SSW of the north access road to Thangoo Station, 37 km SSE of Broome or, in a straight line 14.4 km south of the Roebuck Plains.

Between 30 January and 5 February 2024, Chris Mitchell on our behalf requested additional anecdotal observations of these lizards by local residents on Facebook page

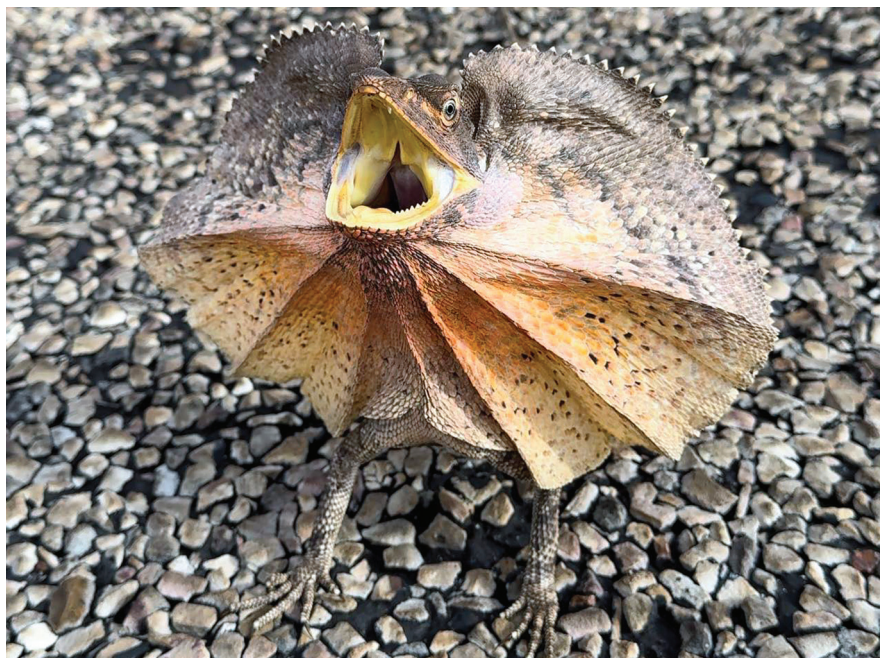


Figure 1. Frilled Lizard (*Chlamydosaurus kingii*) photographed on Great Northern Highway 82.5 km SSW of Broome, WA. Photo: C. Lehmann.

Broome's Natural Environment. We also sent similar requests by email to the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions, Barn Hill Station Stay, Shamrock Station and through a live broadcast with Andrew Collins on radio station ABC Statewide Drive. This resulted in the following list of localities where these lizards have been seen south of the Roebuck Plains: Eco Beach (2 respondents), Port Smith (2), Shamrock Station (1) and widespread in the general area (1). Except for the last mentioned, all these localities share an abundance of large well-established trees making them ideal localised habitats for this large arboreal lizard. Its apparent scarcity over much of the remaining area of

pindan south of the Roebuck Plains is probably associated with the lack of large trees in the *Acacia*-dominated shrublands.

It was reported by one of our respondents that these dragons would appear to “come and go” at Port Smith; however, we believe this was an impression caused by the seasonal shift in this species’ behaviour: it is frequently seen during the monsoonal months when active on the ground or close to the ground when perched on the bottom portion of the tree trunks to heights of 2 m, and then unsuspected during the dry season when inactive and aestivating high up in the canopy at the tops of the trees (Melville & Wilson 2019).

With this being only the first published observation of a Frilled Lizard south of the Roebuck Plains since that of Bush (1985), local surveys in the area are needed away from the highway to determine both its actual abundance in this southwestern part of its range and if these records represent accidental localised introductions. However, the latter appears unlikely as one could expect more reports of this species from much further south well outside its natural range including in the Perth metropolitan area.

Acknowledgement

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References

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