



Two Instances in South Australia of Sleepy Lizards, *Tiliqua rugosa* (Gray 1825), Feeding on Plant Species not Previously Recorded as Part of this Lizard's Diet

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Photographs by the senior author.

The Sleepy Lizard (*Tiliqua rugosa*) is a large omnivorous skink that is endemic to southern Australia (Cogger 2014). These lizards usually feed on the leaves, flowers, and/or fruit of a variety of plants and will also opportunistically feed on invertebrates, small vertebrates, and carrion (Yeatman 1988; Henle 1990; Dubas and Bull 1991). Herein we describe two instances of adult Sleepy Lizards feeding on plants not previously recorded as part of their diet.

At 0945 h on 9 December 2018, the senior author observed a Sleepy Lizard on Salford Road, a dirt road in the Mid North Region of South Australia (33°58'05"S, 139°13'23"E; 213 m asl; datum: WGS84). The lizard was next to a Wild Oat (*Avena fatua*) growing in the road and when the lizard gaped as a threat display, the inflorescence



Fig. 1. A Sleepy Lizard (*Tiliqua rugosa*) found on 9 December 2018 eating the inflorescence of a Wild Oat (*Avena fatua*).



Fig. 2. A Sleepy Lizard (*Tiliqua rugosa*) found on the roadside on 23 December 2018 surrounded by Wild Sage (*Salvia verbenaca*), which is occasionally eaten by these lizards.

and leaves of the grass were observed inside its mouth (Fig. 1). At 1115 h on 23 December 2018, the senior author noticed another *T. rugosa* on the roadside (Fig. 2) of the same dirt road but at a different locality (33°54'47"S, 139°18'35"E; 161 m asl; datum: WGS84). While being handled, this lizard also gaped, and it had fragments of the leaves of Wards Weed (*Carrichtera annua*) and Stemless Thistle (*Onopordum acaulon*) in its mouth (Fig. 3). The senior author also observed



Fig. 3. Part of a Stemless Thistle (*Onopordum acaulon*) leaf is still protruding from the mouth of a Sleepy Lizard (*Tiliqua rugosa*) caught on 23 December 2018.

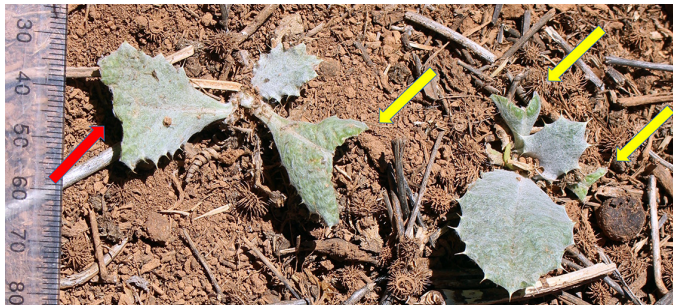


Fig. 4. Stemless Thistle (*Onopordum acaulon*) seedlings eaten by a Sleepy Lizard (*Tiliqua rugosa*) caught on 23 December 2018. The yellow arrows indicate fresh leaf damage where the lizard bit off parts of the leaves. The red arrow indicates old damage to a leaf, likely caused by a lizard on another day.

signs of recent and past foraging in the vicinity of where the lizard was caught (Fig. 4).

To the best of our knowledge, neither *A. fatua* or *O. acaulon* have previously been recorded as part of the diet of *T. rugosa*. At the time of our observations, South Australia was experiencing a drought and plant species such as *C. annua*, which is commonly eaten by *T. rugosa*, were either absent or had stunted growth. Consequently, the lizards likely were feeding on plants that they would not usually eat due to a shortage of their preferred food. Our observations contribute to the list of species that are utilized as food. They also illustrate the importance of continued monitoring. For an omnivorous opportunistic species such as the Sleepy Lizard, observations throughout its range, in different seasons, and among seasons under different climatic conditions are required to have a thorough understanding of what plant species Sleepy Lizards exploit for food.

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