

# SUNGAZER

*Cordylus giganteus*

## OTHER NAMES

Giant Zonure, Giant Girdled Lizard or Oувolk (Afrikaans - also refers to other Girdled Lizards)

## DESCRIPTION

Length

- up to 35-40cm

## Key identification features (adult)

This is the largest of the girdled lizards. It is brown in colour on the upper surface; merging to straw/yellow colouring along the side of the body and yellow underneath. This lizard has four very large, spiny scales on the back of the head. Along the body the dorsal (back) scales are larger than the lateral (side) scales, which are smaller but still spiny. The tail has whorls of large, very spinose (spiny) scales, decreasing in size from the base to the tip. Juveniles are generally similar to adults but with patches of orange-brown on the body.



## Habits

Sungazers, unlike other girdled lizards which live on rocks, make shallow burrows in open grassland. They are diurnal (active during the day) and are often seen basking on the ground near the burrow or, less often, on a termite mound. They live in colonies and dig burrows

into the silty soil of the *Themeda* grassland in South Africa. The name Sungazer comes from their habit of sitting at the burrow entrance looking up at the sun. They hibernate (dormant state similar to sleep) during the winter and are rarely seen at all between May and mid-August.



## ECOLOGY

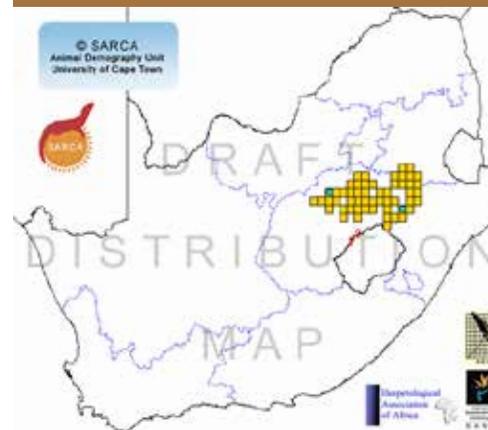
### Diet

Sungazers eat insects, especially beetles. Juveniles eat predominantly ants and other small insects.

## CONSERVATION STATUS:

The Sungazer is endemic (only found in one particular country or geographic area) to South Africa. It is found in the highland grasslands of the north eastern Free State as well as a small population in south western Mpumalanga province.

The population status is unknown but thought to be declining. Globally and nationally the Giant Girdled Lizard is classified as Vulnerable (IUCN Red List). Find out more at [www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)



## WHY ARE SUNGAZERS THREATENED?

Sungazers only reproduce every other year, and only produce one or two offspring. They are viviparous meaning they give birth to live young. The population is thought to be in decline due to habitat destruction as a result of conversion of grassland to farmland (maize, sunflower and other crop farming), illegal collecting for the pet trade, as well as collection for the muti (traditional medicine) industry.

Conversion/transformation (especially plowing) of native grassland is the biggest threat to the species. It has been recorded that animals do not seem to return to previously plowed land.

## WHAT IS THE EWT DOING TO CONSERVE GIANT GIRDLED LIZARDS?

The EWT is initially re-assessing the population status of the species in order to update the IUCN Red List status which was last assessed in 1996. Following this, a Biodiversity Management Plan for the species will be developed in order to increase awareness of the species and to avoid further plowing of Sungazer habitat.

Priority sites will be conserved through conservation stewardship processes. Finally, the mitigation of current threats such as the development of a new N3 highway route will be addressed through relocation of affected individuals.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Assist with the improved awareness of the need for ecologically friendly farming practices. Do not encourage the keeping of reptiles as pets (especially indigenous species, which is not legal). Sponsorship is required for extensive field work, education, conservation implementation and awareness.

Support conservation organizations such as the Endangered Wildlife Trust – go to [www.ewt.org.za](http://www.ewt.org.za) to find out how.