

Nucras ornata (Gray, 1864) ORNATE SANDVELD LIZARD

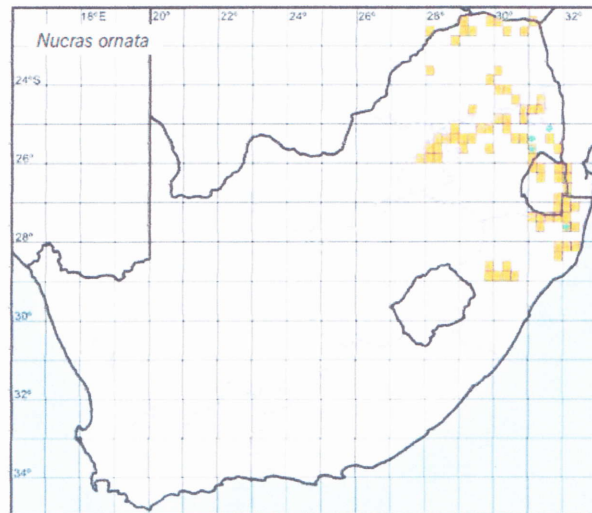
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Regional: Least Concern

Taxonomy: Previous assessments of the *Nucras tessellata* complex, which includes *N. ornata*, presented various morphological characters to distinguish between the taxa (Broadley 1972; Jacobsen 1989; Bates 1996a). Jacobsen (1989) presented morphological characters to distinguish between the *holubi* and *ornata* morphs of *N. taeniolata* in the northern parts of South Africa. He revived *N. t. holubi* as a valid taxon (later raised to species rank by Bates 1996a) and considered the *ornata* morph a full species. A molecular phylogeny of the genus *Nucras* confirmed the species status of *N. ornata*, which is the sister species of *N. intertexta*, but is also closely related to *N. holubi* (Edwards *et al.* 2013b).

Distribution: Extends from southern Zambia and Malawi, south through Zimbabwe into South Africa and Swaziland, with a few records from Mozambique (Broadley 1972; Jacobsen 1989). Namibian records plotted by Broadley (1972) are isolated and require further investigation. The boundaries of this species' distribution in the *Atlas* region have not been clearly established because of uncertainty about specimen identifications. Its distribution here is in the northeastern regions, primarily Limpopo, Gauteng, northern Mpumalanga (Jacobsen 1989), Swaziland (Boycott 1992) and KwaZulu-Natal (Bourquin 2004). Based on the assessment of Bates (1996a), records of *N. t. ornata* from the Free State and Northern Cape plotted by Broadley (1972) and Visser (1984f) are not plotted here because they are probably referable to *N. holubi* or *N. intertexta*.

Habitat: A terrestrial species that frequents grass tussocks and leaf litter on rocky hillsides in montane grassland and in mesic savanna. It often occupies burrows in the ground, including those under rocks. The altitudinal range in the *Atlas* region is from about 300 m in KwaZulu-Natal to about 1 700 m in the northern part of the range (Jacobsen 1989; Branch 1998; Bourquin 2004).



Nucras ornata—Manyiseni region, Lebombo Mtns, KZN

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Biome: Savanna; Grassland; Indian Ocean Coastal Belt.

Assessment rationale: Common, with a relatively wide distribution in the *Atlas* region. The range extends into several other countries to the north.

Conservation measures: None recommended.