

Project Update: June 2007

This project, the first systematic survey on the Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard *Uromastyx hardwickii*, commenced in March (2007). So far, over the last three months, two of the five arid districts have been surveyed completely (Sri Ganganagar, Bikaner) while two more districts (Jaisalmer, Barmer) have been surveyed partially.

A combination of vehicular transects and interviews with local people have been used to map the current distribution of the species, prioritise sites for conservation and identify the major threats. So far, this lizard has mainly been found to occur in the 'thalar' habitat of the desert region i.e. gravelly plains where grass is the dominant vegetation. So far, substantial numbers of the lizard have been found only in Jaisalmer district, with densities being as high as 200 burrows per ha. However, in Bikaner, the distribution of *U. hardwickii* is patchy, and the 'thalars' are smaller and surrounded by fields or sand dunes. In Sri Ganganagar, preliminary analysis suggests that it may be on the verge of local extinction, with most of the land area under intensive cultivation. *Uromastyx* were found in just two localities –with both supporting less than 20 burrows. The species seems to have disappeared from many parts of western Barmer too, but this seems to be due to the floods of last year; however there are a few animals in the north western region. Large-scale habitat destruction caused by climate change and agriculture appear to be a more serious threat to the species than hunting.