

Genus *Vhembelacerta* Edwards, Herrel, Vanhooydonck, Measey, Tolley & Branch—Soutpansberg rock lizards

Vhembelacerta contains a single species, *V. rupicola*, restricted to the Soutpansberg range in Limpopo Province, South Africa. A recent analysis of mitochondrial and nuclear DNA sequences indicated that this species, until recently classified in the genus *Australolacerta*, is not closely related to *A. australis* (which is more closely related to *Tropidosaura*—see also Salvi *et al.* 2011) and

it should be placed in a separate genus (Edwards *et al.* 2012, 2013a). Female *A. rupicola* lay clutches of 3–4 eggs (Kirschhoff & Richter 2009). The habitat of *A. rupicola* is inadequately protected and subject to large-scale timber planting, but it is for the most part not inhabited by people and this species is therefore categorised as Near Threatened.

Vhembelacerta rupicola (FitzSimons, 1933) SOUTPANSBERG ROCK LIZARD

Andrew A. Turner

Global: Near Threatened

Endemic

Taxonomy: An analysis of mitochondrial and nuclear DNA sequence data indicated that *A. rupicola* should be placed in a separate genus (S. Edwards *et al.* 2012).

Distribution: Endemic to Limpopo, South Africa. Occurs widely throughout the Soutpansberg Range (Jacobsen 1988c; Branch 1998).

E00: 2 570 km² (confidence: medium); A00: 1 216 km² (confidence: medium).

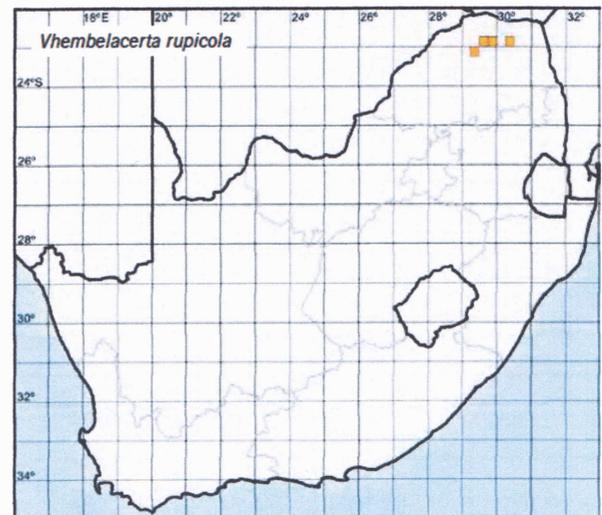
Habitat: Occurs on rocky outcrops, scree slopes and bed-rock (Jacobsen 1988c) in wooded savanna and forest fringes on mountain slopes. Found mainly at the edge of Soutpansberg Mountain Bushveld or mistbelt forest with rocky outcrops on southern and southeastern slopes at altitudes of 800–1 600 m (Kirchhof & Richter 2009). Forages in leaf litter and seeks refuge in rock cracks at night (Kirchhof *et al.* 2010).

Bioregion: Central Bushveld, Mesic Highveld Grassland.

Assessment rationale: Both E00 and A00 are below the Vulnerable threshold and a decline in the quantity and quality of suitable habitat due to future land-use changes is predicted [B1b(ii,iii)+2b(ii,iii)]. However, it is not known to what extent existing populations are fragmented or how many locations exist. The species is therefore considered Near Threatened.

Threats: Large-scale timber plantations. However, this lizard is able to survive in areas that are too arid for plantations and this reduces the severity of the threat. The increasing demand for indigenous trees as a fuel source may reduce the amount and quality of habitat.

Conservation measures: Perform a detailed survey of the Soutpansberg range to accurately assess E00. Not known to occur in any formally protected areas, but does occur at Lajuma where it receives some protection. Therefore, establish secure protected areas that include the range of the species.



Vhembelacerta rupicola—Soutpansberg, LIMP

J. Marais