

Creatures of the Dunes

Coastal dune inhabitants

Several animal species have adapted to live in the sparsely-vegetated loose sand habitats of coastal dune fields. Species living specifically in the Northern Cape's coastal dune fields include:

Reptiles:

- Austen's Gecko
- Namib Dune Gecko (**Critically Endangered**)
- Smith's Desert Lizard
- Wedge-Snouted Desert Lizard
- Coastal Legless Skink
- Lomi's Blind Legless Skink (**Near Threatened**)

Amphibians:

- Desert Rain Frog (**Vulnerable**)

Mammals:

- De Winton's Golden Mole (**Critically Endangered**)
- Grant's Golden Mole



Sources: Atlas and Red List of the Reptiles of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland (Bates *et al.*, 2014). Mammals of the Southern African Subregion (Skinner & Chimimba, 2005).

Adaptations to dune living

Animals living in dunes have developed adaptations to make life easier for them in a habitat characterised by loose sand. Many of these animals live or stay underneath the sand during the day to avoid high surface temperatures.

- The Legless Skink is a type of lizard that has adapted to sand-swimming by losing its legs, and developing a shovel-like snout.
- Grant's Golden Mole have broad, hollowed claws, thickened pads on hind feet, and a hard-leathery snout that protects the nostrils from sand.



Typhlosaurus lomiae—Noup, Namaqualand, NC

J. Marais

Top: The Near Threatened Lomi's Blind Legless Skink.

Threats to dune habitats

The Northern Cape's dune habitats are mainly threatened by destruction through diamond mining, and to a lesser extent by residential development. Future industrial development might also cause a threat to these habitats.

Off-road driving may damage the dune vegetation that maintains the structure of dune fields. Off-road driving also directly threatens the animal species that lives underneath the sand, or those, like the Grant's Golden Mole that rest during the day to depths of up to 50 cm underneath the surface of the sand.



Namib Desert Golden Mole, *Eremitalpa granti namibensis*.
Photo by G. Rathbun.

Top: The Namibian variant of Grant's Golden Mole.

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