

## FLORIDA KEYS MOLE SKINK

*Plestiodon egregius egregius*



**Order:** Squamata  
**Family:** Scincidae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G5T1/S1  
**U.S. Status:** none  
**FL Status:** Threatened

**Description:** A small, slender, brownish lizard with smooth, shiny scales; neck and head of equal width; a red to brownish-red tail with hints of black stripes; and two or more pairs of light stripes extending from head and neck which may or may not reach base of tail. Legs small but fully developed, with five toes on each foot. Breeding males develop orange to reddish sides. Adults up to 5 in. (127 mm) total length; the tail comprises slightly more than half.

**Similar Species:** Two other skinks occur in the Keys. The ground skink (*Scincella lateralis*) is bronze to brown, including the tail, and has a dark lateral stripe and light belly. Juvenile southeastern five-lined skink (*Eumeces inexpectatus*) has bright blue tail, gold stripes on a black back, and more robust body. The related peninsular mole skink (*E. e. onocrepis*), which reaches tip of peninsula and may intergrade with Keys form in Upper Keys, is similar to Keys mole skink, but tail color may be blue, pink, brown, or red, and there is a single pair of light stripes extending from nose over eye onto forepart of body. Several species of small geckos occur in the Keys, but these have keeled or granular, not smooth and shiny, scales. Anoles (*Anolis* spp.) are brown or green with dull, somewhat sandpapery skin; have large heads and long legs; and often climb trees or bushes.

**Habitat:** Secretive, often among or under stones, debris, driftwood, and tidal wrack; may require loose sands for burrowing. Rarely if ever climbs.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Present and potentially active year-round, but habits poorly known.

**Florida Distribution:** Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas. Specimens in Upper Keys appear to intergrade with peninsular mole skink. Known from the following keys: Key Largo, Upper Matecumbe, Indian, Grassy, Vaca, Big Pine, Middle Torch, Stock Island, and Key West; may occur on others.

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**Range-wide Distribution:** Same as Florida distribution. Other subspecies of mole skink range throughout the state and into southern Georgia and Alabama.

**Conservation Status:** National wildlife refuges in Lower Keys, and state lands in Upper Keys, protect some habitat, but development threatens most private tracts.

**Protection and Management:** Manage habitat of known populations to keep it in as natural a state as possible.

**References:** Ashton and Ashton 1991, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Lazell 1989, Mitchell 1977, Moler (ed.) 1992.



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