

BLUE-TAILED MOLE SKINK

Plestiodon egregius lividus



Order: Squamata
Family: Scincidae
FNAI Ranks: G5T2/S2
U.S. Status: Threatened
FL Status: Threatened

Description: A small, slender, brownish lizard with smooth, shiny scales; neck and head of equal width; a blue tail that may become pinkish with age; and two faint light lines on upper sides that diverge posteriorly. Legs small but fully developed, with five toes on each foot. Late-winter breeding males develop orange sides. Adults up to 5 in. (127 mm) total length; the tail comprises slightly more than half.

Similar Species: Several other small skinks occur within or near the range of this subspecies. Older adult blue-tailed mole skinks, and those with broken or regenerated tails, are indistinguishable from the related peninsular mole skink (*Eumeces e. onocrepis*), so identification must be based on locality. The sand skink (*Neoseps reynoldsi*; see species account) is very pale, lacks stripes, and has tiny legs with only one or two toes per foot. The widespread ground skink (*Scincella lateralis*) is bronze to brown, with a dark lateral stripe and light belly. Juvenile five-lined, southeastern five-lined, and broad-headed skinks (*E. fasciatus*, *E. inexpectatus*, and *E. laticeps*) have bright blue tails, gold stripes on a black back, and more robust bodies. All salamanders lack scales.

Habitat: Well-drained sandy uplands above 100 ft. (30 m), usually with an abundance of scattered shrubs and lichens. Favors rosemary, oak, and sand pine scrubs; occasional in turkey oak barrens, sandhill, and xeric hammock. Requires loose sand (for burrowing) with patches of sparse to no groundcover or canopy; often found in leaf litter.

Seasonal Occurrence: Present but difficult to observe year-round.

Florida Distribution: Lake Wales Ridge in Polk, Highlands, and western Osceola counties.

Range-wide Distribution: Same as Florida distribution. Other subspecies of *E.*

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egregius range throughout the state and into southern Georgia and Alabama.

Conservation Status: Occurs within a series of disjunct state, federal, and private conservation lands. Most original habitat has been destroyed for citrus and development.

Protection and Management: Management may entail infrequent prescribed fire.

References: Ashton and Ashton 1991, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Moler (ed.) 1992, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1987.



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