



Northern Prairie Skink (*Plestiodon septentrionalis*)

Ples-tee-o-don sept-tent-trio-nal-iss



Description: 4 to 9 inches. The northern prairie skink is a small, very smooth scaled species of lizard with relatively small, reduced limbs. Ground color of adults can range from tan, bronze, to light brown, with two wide, darker brown to black lateral stripes on each side. These stripes are bordered by two rows of paler cream to yellowish stripes. There may also be 1 to 3 paler dorsal stripes present as well. Juvenile northern prairie skinks also possess a vibrant dark blue tail, while adult males develop reddish to reddish orange throats and jaws during the breeding season. A lighter ground color and the two dark wider lateral stripes, as well as general range in WI distinguish it from the similar five lined skink (*Plestiodon fasciatus*).

Taxonomy and Classification:

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Lacertillia

Infraorder: Scincomorpha

Family: Scincidae

Genus: Plestiodon

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Species: *Plestiodon septentrionalis**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: The five lined skink (*Plestiodon fasciatus*) has five, paler colored longitudinal stripes on a darker ground color. Prairie racerunners (*Aspidoscelis sexlineata*) have granular scales, unlike skinks.

Etymology: Plestiodon- Pleistos (most) odontos (teeth). septentrionalis-north or northern.

Subspecies: Northern Prairie Skink (*Plestiodon septentrionalis septentrionalis*).

Range & Habitat: Generally occupies the northwestern portion of the state, but an introduced population is known from one county in central Wisconsin. They generally prefer habitats with sandy soil including oak and pine barrens, forest and woodlot edges and openings, and road or railroad grades adjacent to these habitats.

Habits & Natural History: Northern prairie skinks are fairly secretive diurnal species, often occurring in microhabitats such as under rocks, logs, bark, rotting stumps, and other natural or manmade debris. Primarily terrestrial, these skinks hunt for and consume small insects, arthropods, and other invertebrates. As with other skinks, northern prairie skinks will often undergo caudal autotomy when captured or disturbed, which involves dropping all or parts of their tail to avoid predation. A new tail regenerates within several weeks, but is not as vibrantly colored as the original. Northern prairie skinks are oviparous, or egg laying.

Phenology: Northern prairie skinks emerge from overwintering as early as late April or May, and remain active throughout the year through late September or October (or even later into the year if warmer temperatures persist or otherwise permit).

Conservation Status: WI Locally common, but no special protections afforded. Regulated by WI DNR. IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this species, group of species, or this informational sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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