



## **Prairie Racerunner (*Aspidoscelis sexlineata*)**

*As-pid-dose-sell-ees sex-lin-e-at-iss veer-id-iss*



**Description:** 5 to 9 ½ inches in length. The prairie racerunner is a small teiid lizard that can be distinguished from skinks (genus *Plestiodon*) by rougher, granular scales, and enlarged, rectangular scalation on the head and ventral surfaces. Ground color is usually a dark brown to black with six well defined yellowish to greenish yellow longitudinal stripes. The head is unpatterned, and juvenile racerunners often have a vibrantly colored blue tail. During the breeding season, adult males develop a vibrant blue wash across their jaws, throat, and ventral surface (which is otherwise pale colored and unmarked).

### **Taxonomy and Classification:**

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

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**Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Reptilia

**Order:** Squamata

**Suborder:** Lacertilia

**Infraorder:** Scincomorpha

**Family:** Teiidae

**Genus:** *Aspidoscelis*

**Species:** *Aspidoscelis sexlineata*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

**Similar/Confusing Species:** Skinks (*Plestiodon* sp.) have smooth, non-granular scalation unlike prairie racerunners.

**Etymology:** Aspidoscelis- Aspido (shield) skelos (leg). sexlineata-sex (six); lineatus (of a line). viridis (green, fresh, lively, vigorous, or youthful).

**Subspecies:** Prairie racerunner (*Aspidoscelis s. viridis*).

**Range & Habitat:** Generally occupies the driftless region of extreme western and southwestern Wisconsin. Prairie racerunners are strongly associated with sandy soiled habitats including sand prairies, oak, sand, and pine barrens, oak savannahs, old fields, and open, dry bluff prairies and valleys.

**Habits & Natural History:** Prairie racerunners are active, diurnal lizards that often reach their peak daily activity during the warmest portions of the day beginning in May through September. As their name implies, racerunners have been recorded at speeds of up to 18 mph to capture food and to evade predators, which often makes capturing them a difficult task. These lizards patrol and maintain small territories along and among sand blows and other areas in search of small insects, and other invertebrates to consume. Prairie racerunners can undergo caudal autotomy (loss of all or a portion of their tail) to escape predators, but generally do not drop their tails as readily as skinks do. Oviparous, or egg laying.

**Phenology:** Prairie racerunners 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 Special Concern, but regulated by the 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](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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