

Prehensile-tailed Skink



Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Reptilia
Order: Squamata
Family: Scincidae
Genus: *Corucia*
Species: *zebrata*



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The prehensile-tailed skink is found in primary and secondary tropical forests of the Solomon Islands, located northeast of Australia.
- **Exhibit Location:** Adaptation of Animals & USS Antiquities

Characteristics

- The prehensile-tailed skink is the largest of the known skinks, measuring up to 32 inches from the snout to the tip of the tail. They can weigh 14-28 ounces.
- The body is olive to green in color, with scattered black scales on the back and legs, helping to camouflage it from enemies. The head is flat and triangular. It has thick, strong, short legs and sharp claws that help it climb trees. The skin of this skink is smoother and shinier than others, and the scales are smooth, flat, and overlapping. Unlike some lizards, it does not have the ability to regenerate if its tail should break off when caught by predators. However, their tails are prehensile, meaning that they can curl them around objects such as branches and hold onto them for balance.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** Unknown; **In Captivity** about 15 years

Behaviors

- This skink is mainly crepuscular, being active during the early morning and early evening. It can be highly elusive and prefers to hide during the daylight hours, spending most of its time in the trees (arboreal).
- In defense, it can make a sharp hissing noise and can bite savagely.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** Various leafy greens, fruit; changing cage furniture

Reproduction

- Sexual maturity is reached at 2 years of age. Copulation occurs during early evening in the trees and may last from 5-15 minutes.
- The female produces eggs that hatch within her body and are nurtured there until, after about 6-7 months, a single (rarely 2) baby is born (viviparous according to Kevin Wright, Philadelphia Zoo, expert in skinks). The baby is 6-9 inches long and stays with the mother for about 6 months after birth. The father will defend the baby, a very unusual behavior for a reptile.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** primarily on the leaves of the Solomon Island creeper plant; strictly herbivorous (plant eater)
- **At the Zoo:** Chopped greens (kale, romaine, beet, dandelion) with yam & carrot

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** no data; **CITES:** Appendix II
- The Solomons are rapidly being deforested for lumber and agriculture. Destruction of habitat and depletion by the pet trade have greatly reduced this animal's chances for survival.
- Exportation of this species is illegal to protect the declining population.

- Most individuals used as pets are either young and captive bred or older and imported before the CITES sanctions were put into place.
- Low reproduction rates also lend this animal to being threatened.

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Common names: giant skink, Solomon Island skink, monkey-tail skink, Solomon Island prehensile-tailed skink, Solomon Island green tree skink
- This is the only skink that is completely herbivorous.
- This is the only known species of skink with a prehensile, or grasping, tail.

Sources:

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