

## First report of a skink population in Les Saintes (Guadeloupe, FWI)

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In Guadeloupe, skink populations are known only on the islands of Desirade and Terre de Bas of Petite Terre (Breuil 2002; Lorvelec et al. 2011; Hedges & Conn 2012; Paré & Lorvelec 2012; Gomès & Ibéné 2013). Another population on l'Îlet Cochon was listed by Henderson & Breuil (2012), but despite great efforts by Michel Breuil (2002), S. Blair Hedges (pers. comm.), Association pour l'Étude et la protection des Vertébrés et végétaux des petites Antilles (AEVA), and Association pour la Sauvegarde et la Réhabilitation de la Faune des Antilles (ASFA), no observations have been made since its discovery in 1963. Because finding skinks, especially in low-density populations, is difficult, determining whether a species is extant or extinct is frequently impossible.

Until recently, all skink populations in Guadeloupe were assigned to a single species, *Mabuya mabouya* (Lacépède, 1788). Hedges & Conn (2012) proposed a new classification recognizing five species in Guadeloupe: *Mabuya desiradae* on La Désirade and Petite Terre, *Mabuya cochonae* on l'Îlet Cochon, *Mabuya grandisterrae* on Grande-Terre, *Mabuya guadeloupae* on Basse-Terre, and *Capitellum mariagalantae* on Marie-Galante.

Les Saintes Bank is an archipelago comprised of two major islands (Terre-de-Haut and Terre-de-Bas), three islets (Grand llet, llet Cabrit, and La Coche), and additional smaller islets. All are mongoose-free (*Urva auropunctata*) and are the only places in Guadeloupe where endemic racers of the genus *Alsophis* remain abundant.

The only reference to a skink population on Les Saintes Bank was by Lazell (1973), who noted the presence of a species of skink without specifying which islands were inhabited. Breuil (2002) reported this record, adding that Lazell never saw a skink on Les Saintes Bank and was referring to an observation of a skink made by Albert Schwartz. According to Lazell and Breuil, Schwartz might have confused Terre-de-bas on Les Saintes Bank with Terre de Bas in the Petite Terre Islets, where skinks remain present at low density.

On 22 November 2014, one of us (AB) observed a skink basking on leaf litter (Fig. 1) on Terre de Haut (15.86°; -61.58°). When we approached, it escaped into nearby vegetation. We (AB & GR) returned two weeks later and found five skinks in an area of 1,200 m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 2). Habitat is at the edge of dry forest and a clearing. Leaf litter and rocks are abundant in the forest, whereas the clearing is a composite of meadow, dense bush, and an open rocky area.



**Figure 1.** A skink basking on leaf litter on Terre de Haut, Les Saintes Bank, on 22 November 2014. Photo by B. Angin.



**Figure 2.** One of five skinks observed on Terre de Haut, Les Saintes Bank, on 5 December 2014. Photo by B. Angin.

This is the first confirmation of a skink population on Les Saintes Bank. Photographs and field observations confirm that these skinks are in the genus *Mabuya*. Historically, this population would be assigned to the *Mabuya mabouya* complex. However, the work of Hedges & Conn (2012) suggests that it could belong to a new endemic species. This is a reasonable assumption because herpetofaunal studies on Les Saintes Bank have identified a number of bank endemics distinct from relatives on the Guadeloupean Archipelago (e.g., *Alsophis antillensis* and *A. sanctonum*, *Sphaerodactylus fantasticus* and *S. phyzacinus*, *Anolis marmoratus* and *A. terraealtae*).

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