

## Skinks occur on Terre-de-Bas, Les Saintes (Guadeloupe, French West Indies)

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Native skinks (Squamata, Mabuyidae) of the Caribbean islands are threatened with extinction because of the introduction of the Small Indian Mongoose (*Urva auro-punctata*) and many species have been extirpated from portions of their range, or have disappeared entirely (Hedges and Conn, 2012). For this reason, observations of surviving skink populations are important for conservation purposes.

Les Saintes is a Guadeloupean micro-archipelago, located south of Basse-Terre and comprising two main islets, Terre-de-Bas and Terre-de-Haut. They are 850 meters apart and 6.8 and 6.0 km<sup>2</sup> in area, respectively, with several smaller islets. The Small Indian Mongoose is absent from Les Saintes. The first mention of skinks in Les Saintes was by Lazell (1973) who noted their presence without detail of date, islet, or circumstance. The recent (2014) discovery of a small (5 individuals) skink population on Terre-de-Haut of Les Saintes (Angin *et al.* 2015; Angin & Gomès 2015) and the discovery of a specimen collected in 2010 on Terre-de-Bas of Les Saintes and preserved in rum (Angin *et al.* 2015, Gomès & Ibéné 2015) confirm that skinks occur in Les Saintes.

After these recent reports, and because skinks have not been observed previously on Terre-de-Bas of Les Saintes despite regular visits, the possibility arose that they may no longer occur on that islet. However, finding skinks, especially when rare, is often difficult, and deciding if they are present or have disappeared is a challenge. During July 2016, we slowly walked the trails of Terre-de-Bas to search for skinks, covering a total of 34 km in 22 hours, during mornings (07:30–11:30), in forests and in open and mixed habitats. On July 9th we went through old pastures and cotton-indigo fields covered with *Sporobolus* grass and scattered with blocks or piles of stones, in the process of recolonization by the native tree species *Guettarda scabra*, *Tabebuia heterophylla*, and *Coccoloba uvifera*



**Figure 1.** Environment where a skink was observed on Terre-de-Bas (Les Saintes, Guadeloupe) on 9 July 2016.

(Fig. 1). We observed one skink for a few minutes, immobile on a sunny spot at the top of a stone in a small patch of vegetation (15.865, -61.634, elevation 90 m).

The skink moved and disappeared in the vegetation before we could take a photo, but it was similar in size and color (copper-colored) to *Mabuya desiradae* (Hedges & Conn, 2012) and *Mabuya parviterrae* (Hedges *et al.*, 2016). We could not find that individual or other specimens later the same day, or the next morning. From this observation, we conclude that skinks still exist on Terre-de-Bas, in addition to the population on Terre-de-Haut, Les Saintes.

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