

# Common Five-lined Skink and the Department of Defense

The Common Five-lined Skink (*Plestiodon fasciatus*) is a fast-moving lizard that is widely distributed across eastern North America. It is called “scorpion” in some rural areas, and erroneously believed to be venomous.

**Description:** Common Five-lined Skinks are smooth, shiny, medium-sized lizards that reach total lengths of 5 - 8.5 inches (12.5 - 21.5 cm). Adults range from glossy black, brown, or gray, with five yellowish or white stripes (one down the back and two on each side). Juveniles are similarly marked, but with bright blue tails that fade with age (considerably more so in males than females). Heads of males are orange-red during the breeding season. Common Five-lined Skinks are confusingly similar in appearance to two other species with which they may occur, the Broad-headed Skink (*P. laticeps*) and Southeastern Five-lined Skink (*P. inexpectatus*). Separating them requires close examination of scales on the lips and underside of the tail.

**Range:** This lizard occurs across most of the eastern portion of North America, from western New England and southern Ontario to Minnesota, and south through eastern Kansas and eastern Oklahoma to eastern Texas, the Gulf Coast, and northern peninsular Florida.

**Habitat:** Common Five-lined Skinks prefer humid, well-drained wooded areas with abundant cover (rocks, logs, stumps, leaf litter), and a patchy canopy, including bottomland forests and along wooded river margins. They are generally found in moister habitats than the similar Southeastern Five-lined Skink.



**Military Interactions:** This species commonly occurs on DoD properties in the eastern U.S. Common Five-lined Skinks may be encountered both in military training and housing areas. It is the second most common lizard species (Little Brown Skink is the most common) confirmed present on military properties.

**Conservation Status:** The Common Five-lined Skink has no federal conservation status. It is state-endangered in Vermont and state-threatened in Connecticut. It is considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in six states at the periphery of its range. It has a NatureServe Ranking of G5-Secure, and is listed as Least Concern by the IUCN Red list.

**Threats/Planning Considerations:** Threats to this species include destruction and fragmentation of forested habitats. A habitat management practice to benefit this species is to restore and/or maintain patches of forest and retain dead standing trees and fallen logs.



Picture by Dave McNaughton

## Occurrence on Military Lands

Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on 95 military properties (14 Air Force; 48 Army; 5 Marine Corps; and 28 Navy).	Up to an additional 71 military properties (15 Air Force; 24 Army; 4 Marine Corps; and 28 Navy).

**Behavior:** Most often encountered on the ground, these secretive lizards also climb trees, but less so than the similar Broad-headed Skink. They spend much time under cover, often beneath logs or under rotting tree bark. Prey consists of a wide variety of insects, spiders, and other invertebrates. Females lay clutches of several eggs in moist soil or rotten logs, and stay with the eggs for about 60 days until they hatch. As with many other lizards in our region, skinks will break off their tails when restrained, distracting the predator and allowing the lizard to escape. They have fairly small home ranges, with reported diameters of 87 ft (27 m) in males and 29.5 ft (9 m) in females.

