

Common Five-lined Skink (*Plestiodon fasciatus*) Fact Sheet / Teaching Notes



Description:

Common in the eastern US, the Common Five-lined Skink is Ontario's only species of lizard and one of only 5 species of lizard in Canada. It is black or grey in colour with five yellow or cream-coloured stripes running from snout to tail, which fade as it matures. It ranges in size from 12.5-21.5cm (5-8.5in) and has short legs and a long, streamlined body. Young Common Five-lined Skinks, both males and females, have incredibly bright blue tails, the colour of which also fades as they reach sexual maturity. Mature males develop bright orange or red jaws and chin, particularly during breeding season.

Behaviour:

Common Five-lined Skinks feed on invertebrates such as crickets, grasshoppers, spiders, centipedes and beetle larvae. They are particularly important as natural pest controls.

Skinks are preyed upon by larger lizards, birds, mammals and snakes.

Like other reptiles, the skink is a vertebrate (has a back bone) and cold-blooded. It can often be found basking on sunny rocks in order to maintain its preferred body temperature.

The Common Five-lined Skink hibernates in the winter.

When attacked, the Common Five-lined Skink can break off its tail at a weak spot in the bones. This is called *autotomy*. After the tail has been shed, muscles squeeze tightly around the blood vessels to stop the lizard from bleeding too much. Because the nerves in the tail are still working, it keeps thrashing and wriggling around. This confuses the predator so the lizard can escape. A skink's tail can grow back at a rate of about 6mm a week.

Common Five-lined Skinks are oviparous. (They lay eggs.) In June or July, a mature female skink lays a clutch of about 15-18 eggs somewhere moist like in a rotten log. She keeps them warm, raising her own body temperature by basking, and then wrapping herself around them. Depending on the climate, the eggs hatch about 55 days later and, after about one or two days, the hatchlings leave the nest.

A Common Five-lined Skink can live for up to 6 years.

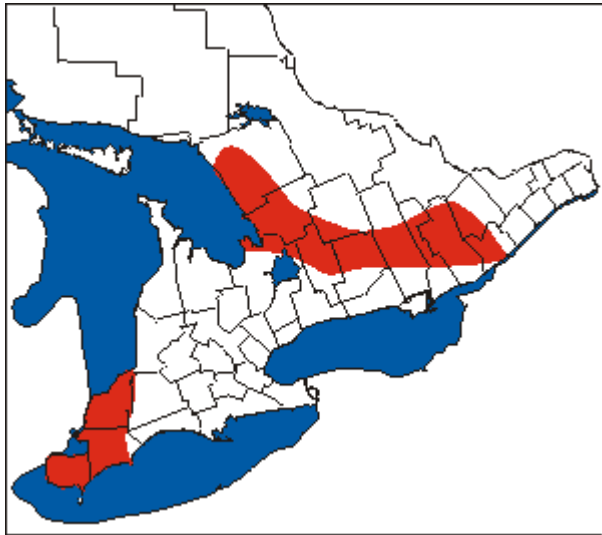
Range:

In Canada, the five-lined skink is found only in southern Ontario, in two distinct zones. The *Carolinian Five-lined Skink Populations* (like Stewie in *Skink on the Brink*) are found on the shores of Lakes Erie, St. Clair and Huron. They can be found in some of Ontario's National and Provincial Parks, such as The Pinery Provincial Park, near Grand Bend on Lake Huron.

The *Great Lakes/ St Lawrence Five-lined Skink Populations* are located on the southern part of the Canadian Shield from Georgian Bay to the St. Lawrence River. They can be found in some of Ontario's National and Provincial Parks such as Bon Echo Provincial Park.

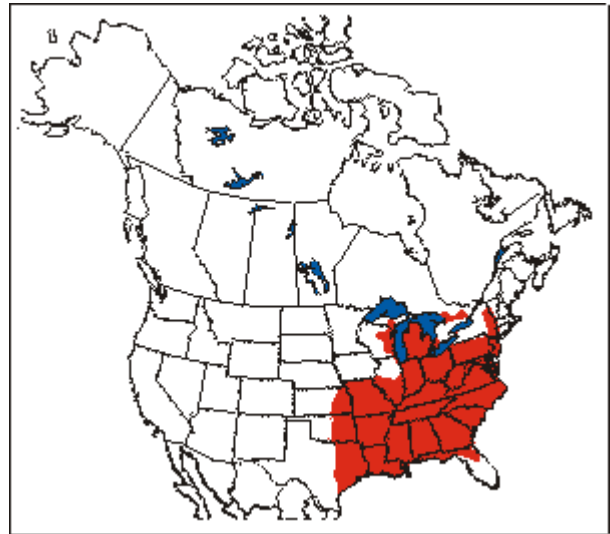
The Common Five-lined Skink is one of the most common lizards in the eastern US. It ranges from the Gulf of Mexico, including Texas and the northern part of Florida, north to the lower Great Lakes and east to the Atlantic Coast. It is rare in parts of New England and is one of only two species of lizard in Michigan. It lives in all eight Midwest states and is common in most areas of Georgia and South Carolina. Its Western border is Minnesota, Missouri, eastern Kansas and Oklahoma.

North American and Canadian Five-Lined Skink Range Maps



Ontario Five-lined Skink Distribution

Modified from: [Seburn and Seburn 1998](#)



North American Five-lined Skink Distribution

Modified from: [Seburn and Seburn 1998](#)

Source: http://www.rom.on.ca/ontario/risk.php?doc_type=map&id=152

Status:

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has listed the *Carolinian Five-Lined Skink* population as an Endangered Species while the *Great Lakes/ St. Lawrence Five-Lined Skink* population is listed as a Species of Special Concern. Its largest threats include destruction of habitat due to agriculture, urban development, cottage construction and recreational trail use. Also, people often clear rocks and woody debris for aesthetic or landscaping purposes. This destroys important skink habitats.

According to the Michigan government, the best way to ensure the survival of the Common Five-lined Skink is through education and “working to manage woodlands and provide the forest edges and sunning spots needed by skinks.”

Curriculum Links:

Skink on the Brink is appropriate as a cross-curricular text. It fits within the elementary school curriculum at all grade levels, illustrating concepts that range from basic to more advanced.

- *Science*: basic concepts (reptile, vertebrate, habitat, cold-blooded, basking); context for more abstract themes (adaptation, evolution, endangered, extinction, etc)
- *Conservation*: brainstorm ways to preserve habitats by being environmentally aware and responsible.
- *Language Arts*: songs and rhymes; recognition of sight words; decoding unfamiliar words through understanding of word endings and rhyme; reading comprehension through text/text, text/world, text/self connections
- *Math*: classification and sorting (animals and plants; reptiles, birds, mammals, etc)
- *Personal and Social Development*: basic feelings (happy, sad, lonely, proud); self-acceptance and self-pride
- *Physical Education*: movement and activities (darting, slithering, dancing, lying, basking)

Additional Links

(NB: The Common Five-lined Skink or *Plestiodon fasciatus* was formerly known as *Eumeces fasciatus*, until a taxonomic change in 2005. Some of the links below, and other resources you might find, may refer to the Common Five-lined Skink by its former name.)

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Fact Sheet.

http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@mnr/@species/documents/document/stdprod_070899.pdf

The Royal Ontario Museum; Ontario's Biodiversity: Species at Risk.

http://www.rom.on.ca/ontario/risk.php?doc_type=fact&id=152

The University of Georgia; Savannah River Ecology Laboratory.

<http://www.uga.edu/srelherp/lizards/eumfas.htm>

Picture of a juvenile Common Five-lined Skink.

<http://media->

7.paradefiles.com/kevincouncilphotography/photos/2009/09/01/IMG_1287%204x6%20crop%20--_fhdr.jpg_1050x700_q85.jpg

Picture of a mature Common Five-lined Skink.

http://www.virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/reptiles/lizards/common-five-lined-skink/sp_fivelinedskink001.JPG

Who's Hiding in the Woods?

Circle all the words you find.



W E A S E L H O M E U
A I R I M O U S E E I
P H H A B I T A T K T
G R E Y R E D S U N A
H S K I N K B L U E I
G R O U N D H E A D L
A S I L S T E W I E V

AIR
BLUE
GREY
TAIL

HOME
RED
SUN
HEAD

GROUND
WEASEL
SKINK
HABITAT

Did you find any other words in the puzzle? Who else was hiding in there?

Home, Home, Habitat

What We Can Do to Help

Review Information to be covered before the activity:

The Carolinian Population of the Common Five-lined Skink is **endangered** in Canada.

The biggest threat to this (and many) endangered species is **destruction of their habitats** – the places they call home.

This can be because of many things that people do, like:

- agriculture
- urban development – building houses and expanding cities
- cottage construction
- recreational trail use – while hiking or camping
- taking rocks and logs for landscaping
- cleaning up rocks and woody debris to make ‘wilderness’ places look cleaner

We can help many endangered plants and animals by **protecting their habitats** when we are in the wilderness.

- Leave all rocks and logs where you find them. They might be somebody’s home. Don’t pick flowers. They might be endangered or be somebody’s supper.
- Don’t try to touch or feed wild animals. Many animals, if they get used to human food, won’t go back to finding their own food. This is not healthy for them and it disrupts the natural food web.
- Take all your garbage back home with you.
- Stay on trails when hiking or biking. We don’t want to squash anybody – or anybody’s home.

If we live somewhere that skinks can already be found, we can help by creating good places for skinks to live and hang out – leaving our wooded gardens as they are and providing warm, safe sunning spots for skinks to bask.

All habitats are part of the environment we all share. By **taking care of the environment**, we can help protect the habitats of endangered species.

- Turn off the lights when we are not using them. This conserves energy, means fewer fossil fuels are burned and reduces pollution.
- Use reusable bottles for drinking water. This reduces garbage and the energy and chemicals needed to produce more bottles.
- Write or colour on both sides of our paper. This saves trees, reduces garbage, and the energy and chemicals needed to produce more paper.
- Walk or ride our bikes to school. This saves energy and reduces pollution.
- Collect water for our gardens in rain barrels. This reduces the amount of water going through treatment plants and leaves more in our lakes and reservoirs.

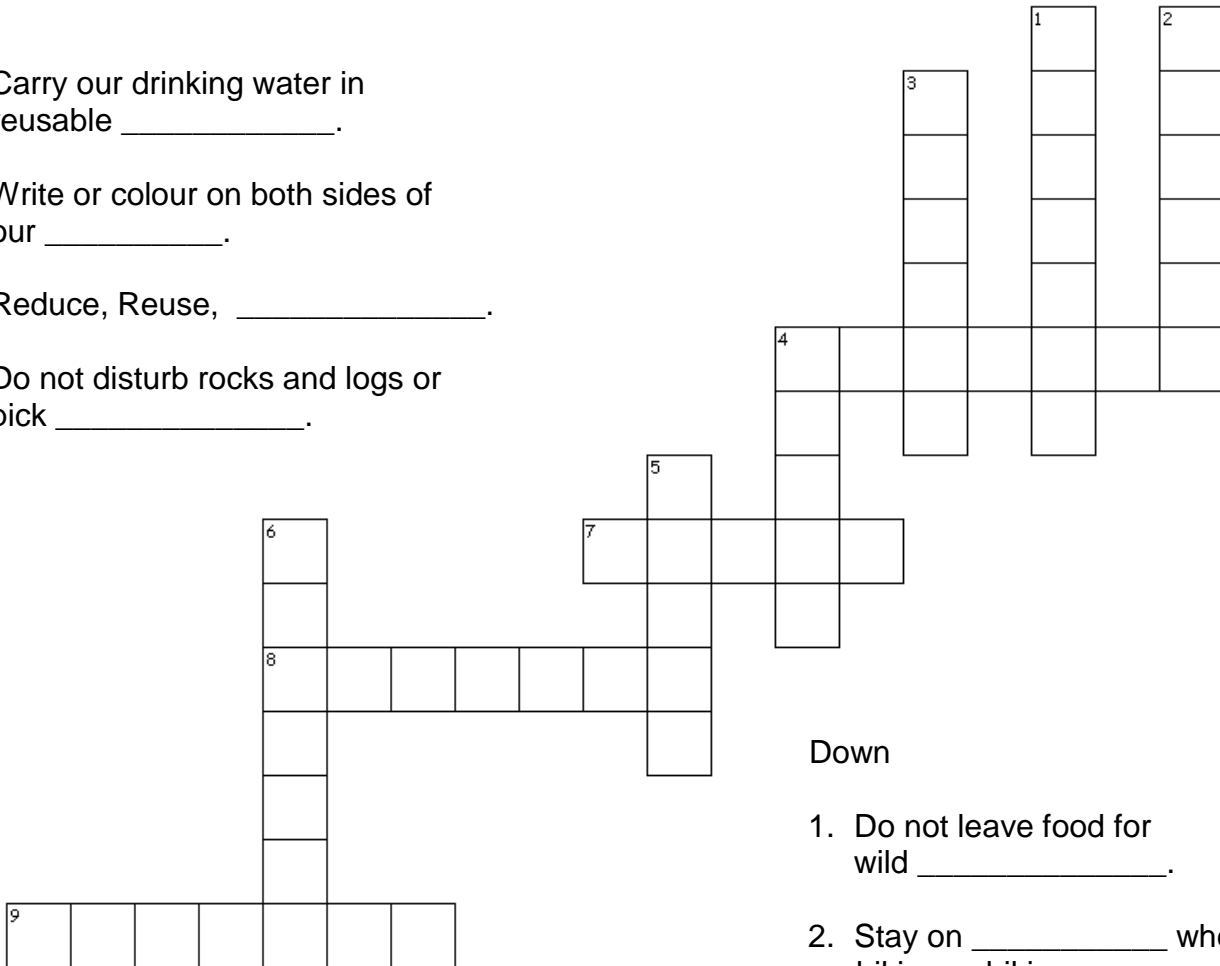
Home, Home, Habitat

What We Can Do to Help

Stewie's habitat is part of the environment we all share.
We can protect Stewie's habitat by protecting the environment too.

Across

4. Carry our drinking water in reusable _____.
7. Write or colour on both sides of our _____.
8. Reduce, Reuse, _____.
9. Do not disturb rocks and logs or pick _____.



Down

1. Do not leave food for wild _____.
2. Stay on _____ when we are hiking or biking.
3. Turn off the _____ when we are not using them.
4. Walk or ride our _____ to school.
5. Collect _____ for our gardens in rain barrels.
6. Bring all our _____ back home.



Meet Stewie the Skink

The Common Five-lined Skink has short legs and a long body. When it moves, it looks like it is slithering. It is a **reptile**, like other lizards and snakes. Reptiles are **cold-blooded**. They can't control their own body temperature, so skinks can often be found **basking** on sunny rocks to absorb the sun's heat.

Skinks eat crickets, grasshoppers, spiders, centipedes and beetle larvae. Larger lizards, birds, mammals and snakes eat skinks.

Skinks are **oviparous**. This means the females lay eggs. This also happens in the spring. Skinks **hibernate** in the winter.

When a Common Five-lined Skink is attacked, its tail can break off and thrash and **wriggle** around. This is called **autotomy**. It confuses the predator so the lizard can escape. The skink grows a new tail.

Common Five-lined Skinks like a special **habitat**, or home, that is hard to find, so there aren't very many of them in Canada. They are **endangered**.

.....

Word Scramble

Use the **bolded** words above to help you unscramble the words in the puzzle below.

TELRIEP	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> 4	NIEHERTAB	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> 10 7 12
LOCD-OEDOLDB	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> - <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> 5	YAMOTTUO	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> 2
NASKIGB	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> 1	TATBAIH	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> 9
VAIROUSPO	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> 14 3	REDNDANEEG	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> 8 11
WIGGREL	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> 6 13 15		

Use the secret code to figure out the most important thing little Stewie wants to tell you about himself.

, !



Stewie's Favourite Song



Circle all the words. Then lightly colour in the circles.

E B E G E I L I K K E H S
 R M M R N W T R N O A M L
 I I Y O D E E I A B O K I
 P L H U A T K A I U N C T
 S C R N N S R T S I I A H
 N N C D G O A E R E I Y E
 I U K Y E T O B U L L M R
 E S E T R S A C N L O O H
 D R S T E W I E C H B T A
 G H E A D C E N T A I O W
 W O O D P E C K E R R T K
 P E X T I N C T I O N U E
 P O N D D E S C H E W A Y

- | | | | | |
|------|-------|---------|---------|------------|
| AIR | HOME | CLIMB | GROUND | HABITAT |
| BLUE | POND | MOUSE | STEWIE | AUTOTOMY |
| GREY | SUN | RHYME | WEASEL | EXTINCTION |
| HAWK | TAIL | SKINK | SLITHER | ENDANGERED |
| HEAD | BRINK | INSPIRE | RACCOON | WOODPECKER |

Write the extra letters in the blanks. What is Stewie's favourite song?

_ _ _ _ _
 _ _ _ _ _ !

Stewie's Favourite Song



Circle all the words. Then lightly colour in the circles.

E	B	E	G	E	I	L	I	K	K	E	H	S
R	M	M	R	N	W	T	R	N	O	A	M	L
I	I	Y	O	D	E	E	I	A	B	O	K	I
P	L	H	U	A	T	K	A	I	U	N	C	T
S	C	R	N	N	S	R	T	S	I	I	A	H
N	N	C	D	G	O	A	E	R	E	I	Y	E
I	U	K	Y	E	T	O	B	U	L	L	M	R
E	S	E	T	R	S	A	C	N	L	O	O	H
D	R	S	T	E	W	I	E	C	H	B	T	A
G	H	E	A	D	C	E	N	T	A	I	O	W
W	O	O	D	P	E	C	K	E	R	R	T	K
P	E	X	T	I	N	C	T	I	O	N	U	E
P	O	N	D	D	E	S	C	H	E	W	A	Y

- | | | | | |
|------|-------|---------|---------|------------|
| AIR | HOME | CLIMB | GROUND | HABITAT |
| BLUE | POND | MOUSE | STEWIE | AUTOTOMY |
| GREY | SUN | RHYME | WEASEL | EXTINCTION |
| HAWK | TAIL | SKINK | SLITHER | ENDANGERED |
| HEAD | BRINK | INSPIRE | RACCOON | WOODPECKER |

Write the extra letters in the blanks. What is Stewie's favourite song?

I L I K E T O E A T C R I C K E T S
 A N D C E N T I P E D E S C H E W Y !

Skink on the Brink
by Lisa Dalrymple, illustrated by Suzanne Del Rizzo
Fitzhenry & Whiteside Publisher 2013





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HOW TO MAKE A PLASTICINE STEWIE



Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



Step 4



Step 5