

Know your species

Name

Orange-tail skink (*Gongylomorphus fontenayi* ssp)

Status

Currently the species is critically endangered. Genetic studies in 2001-2 predicted a population size of approximately 800 individuals. Therefore it is likely that the current population size is larger than this.

Distribution

The species is restricted to Flat Island, an island 253km² situated 11.5km off the northern coast of Mauritius. Recent studies have identified its sub-specific relationship to the Macchabe skink, suggesting that both species once had a wider distribution throughout Mauritius as the Macchabe skink is still found on the main island.



Biology/Ecology

Although the species has been located throughout Flat Island the population is most concentrated within a relatively humid and cooler area of non-native *Sapindus trifoliatus* forest. This area also possessed a thicker layer of leaf litter. The species has been shown to make use of rotten logs and fallen branches as refugia.

Threats

Currently the species is relatively secure on the island. However, there are plans to develop a road that will transect the island, cutting through the forested area containing the highest population concentration of the species. The road is in the process of being built. The risk of species introductions (rats, musk shrew, cats and wolf snakes) are high. The movement of materials to build the road and the forecasted increase in tourist visits in order to see the island and its historic buildings provide multiple routes of invasion for these species.

Photo credit: Nick Cole