

**Classification:** Phylum: Chordata; Class: Reptilia; Order: Squamata; Family Scincidae; Genus: *Leiolopisma*



**Scientific name:** *Leiolopisma telfairii*

**Common name:** Telfair's skink

**Distinguishing features:** Large grey-brown lizard usually with speckles on the back

**Distribution & habitat:** Once widespread throughout Mauritius. Became restricted to Round Island occupying numerous habitats, but abundant in palm rich areas. Recently moved to Gunners Quoin and Ile aux Aigrettes, preferring denser parts of the forest, although also be seen in open areas, such as the paths

### **Biology**

**Size:** average 31cm total length, but can reach 45cm (half of which is tail)

**Weight:** average 100g, but can reach 240g

**Lifespan:** not known in the wild, possibly at least 15yrs for a reptile of its size

**Clutch size:** average of 6 eggs

**Incubation:** Eggs are laid in the soil and take an average of 60 days

**Maturity:** Usually by 2<sup>nd</sup> year or if total length is greater than 20cm

**Diet:** A wide variety of foods; mostly invertebrates and fruits, occasionally small vertebrates

**Behaviour:** Inquisitive lizards with a good sense of smell and hearing. Mostly active in the morning and afternoon, hiding from the sun at midday. Sometimes hunt on full moonlit nights, although usually asleep in rock cavities, tree roots or in leaf litter. Spend most of their time on the ground. Breeding starts September/October, mating can be very aggressive; eggs laid from October; young emerge from December ready for the rains and an influx of food. There is no parental care.

**Conservation work:** Lost from the mainland and all islands except Round Island because it was one of very few locations never invaded by rats. Island restoration work and rat removal has allowed us to start moving the skinks back to secure islands like Ile aux Aigrettes. Between 2006-2007 we released 260 skinks on Ile aux Aigrettes and 250 on Gunners Quoin to safe-guard against the skink's extinction should rats ever reach Round Island. Moving the skinks back to these islands is also assisting island restoration, as the skinks are predators of over-abundant prey, mostly introduced 'pest' species (e.g. African land snail, couleuvre, shrew), they eat the fruits of native trees and disperse their seeds (e.g. ebony, vacoas, bois de chandelle etc) and pollinate plants (e.g. blue latan palm, bois de boeuf, vacoas etc).

**Other interesting facts:** As with all reptiles, these skinks are cold blooded, needing the warmth of the sun for their bodies to operate. They are therefore often seen basking in the sun to warm up, but not for so long that they overheat so generally avoid the midday sun. As with most lizards the skinks can drop their tails to evade predation or an aggressive interaction. Tails do grow back, but it requires extra food and is therefore a burden to the lizard.

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