

A CEYLON
PRESS TINY
GUIDE

A
CHECKLIST
OF THE 31
SKINKS
OF SRI
LANKA

SKINKS



1

ADAM'S PEAK
LANKA SKINK
(*LANKASCINCUS SRIPADENSIS*)

Several new skink species were discovered in 2007 – including the endemic Adam's Peak Lanka Skink. Bronze in colour with a dark brown streak along its 58mm body, it has four legs each with 4 tiny toes. Little is known about it, though it is unlikely to be found beyond of the slopes of the sacred mountain on which it currently dwells.

2
BEDDOME'S
SKINK
(EUTROPIS BEDDOMII)

Beddome's Skink is found right across India and Sri Lanka, a modest 55mm in size and joyfully untroubled by the excesses of the modern world. It has four legs and four toes attached to each one and distinctive striped markings.

3

BURTON'S
NESSIA
(NESSIA BURTONII)

Also known as the Three-Toed Snake Skink and Gray's Snake Skink) is an endemic skink categorised as "Near Threatened," the best but one Conservation Category. It is found right across the wet zones of Sri Lanka wherever there is soft decaying organic matter: leaves, logs, forest. Two eggs a year are its normal reproductive limit. Some 60mm long, it is mostly a black-grey, its stocky snake like body sporting 4 diminutive legs each with three toes. It has the unusual habit of vomiting out its food if caught – presumably to put off its trapper.

4
CEYLON TREE
SKINK

(*LANKASCINCUS TAPROBANENSE*)

The only island skink ever found at altitudes above 7,500 feet, its preferred habitats are Horton Plains, Hakgala, and Nuwara Eliya.

Endangered almost to the point of being critically endangered, it is about 58 mm in length with stocky feet and 4 modest toes. It is endemic, stout, it is bronze-brown all over.

5
COMMON
DOTTED GARDEN
SKINK
(LYGOSOMA RIOPA
PUNCTATA)

Happily, widespread right accords Sri Lanka and the Indian sub-continent - even into Vietnam, this easy-going island resident proves that being common is no deterrent to being quite simply stunning. With its carrot-coloured trail and golden bronze body it looks as if it has strolled out from the showrooms of Cartier, or Bulgari. Certainly, any celebrity empathic enough to adopt one as a pet would have little compunction in not also wearing it like a Plus-One or brooch to one of the better launch parties to which they are invited. Its striking appearance makes it relatively easy to spot as does its uncommon size – which varies from a tiny 34mm to a titanic 148mm.

6

COMMON SUPPLE SKINK

(LANKASCINCUS FALLAX)

Also known as Peter's Tree Skink, this diminutive skink (it is little more than 40mm), is one of several skinks to have suffered from multiple identity syndrome, having been allocated to first one scientific family (Sphenomorphidae *Megalopus* and then another (*Lankascincus fallax*), sewing confusion amongst skink counters for the actual number of skink species on the island. Once thought to be critically endangered by the IUCN Red List assessment, it has since had its status revised and, common as its name implies is considered to be widespread, if rather elusive, right across the island. Reddish bronze in colour, it and four agreeably developed legs each with four toes.

7

CATENATED
LANKA SKINK

(*LANKASCINCUS DORSICATENATUS*)

One of the Sri Lanka's endemic skinks, it rarely exceeds 58.5 mm. Despite laying little more than one egg a year, the beast enjoys the "Least Concern" category in the Red List of Threatened Species. It keeps largely to its preferred habitat limits: the forests and wet zones of southwestern Sri Lanka.

8

DEIGNAN'S TREE SKINK

(LANKASCINCUS DEIGNANI)

A critically endangered endemic skink who can best be found (if found at all) on trees across Sri Lanka's higher hills – anything above around 2,000 feet. Dark olive bronze with a modest stripe, it has four well developed feet, each with four matching toes.

9

DERANIYAGALA'S SNAKE SKINK

(NESSIA DERANIYAGALA)

Known to science from a single specimen collected on a hillock by the beach north of Trincomalee, this endemic skink is about as rare as ever rare gets: so rare in fact that the IUCN Red List doesn't even try to attempt to give it a conservation status at all. Bronze coloured and wholly limbless, almost nothing but its size (62mm) is known about it.

10
DUSSUMIER'S
LITTER SKINK
(SPHENOMORPHUS DUSSUMIERI)

Jean-Jacques Dussumier's skink, sometimes called the Litter Skink, is found not just in Sri Lanka but across southern India too where it lives in most forests habitats below 500 metres. Solitary and territorial, it is a thriving beast of no real conservation concern. About 50mm in length it has a tapering dark black stipe on the side of its body, which are otherwise a speckled bronze; and their tails fade from this into a brilliant tangerine colour.

11

EYED SKINK

(CHALCIDES OCELLATUS)

Long noted as living in the warmer parts of Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Indian sub-continent – its range was recently discovered to include Sri Lanka as well. It was spotted in surveys right across the lowland forest areas of the island from north to south. Its proclivity to eat practically anything may help account for its enormous size (it is about a foot in length) and its untroubled life, for it enjoys the Conservation status least concern.

12
FLOWER'S SKINK
(EUTROPIS FLOWERI)

Also known as Taylor's Striped Mabuya and Taylor's skink it comes from around Trincomalee and is endemic to Sri Lanka. Despite its taxonomy being confirmed in 1950, scientists no little more about it. It is around 50mm in body size and a burnished bronze all over.

13
FOUR-TOED
SNAKE SKINK
(CHALCIDOSEPS THWAITESII)

Some 60 mm in length this endemic beast looks like a golden-brown snake with tiny legs, each sporting four miniature toes. Despite laying up to two eggs a year it is critically endangered, its range restricted to hills in the Knuckles region that are 700 meters or more.

14
GANS'S THREE-
TOED SNAKE
SKINK
(NESSIA GANSI)

Often encountered in the lower and damper parts of Sri Lanka, this endemic skink, has 4 legs with three toes on each. For many years was confused with *Nessia burtonii*, which also has three toes – and later was wrongly mixed up with *Lankascincus gansi*, which turned out to be an identical skink that has been allocated to an entirely separate genus.

15
GREER'S LANKA
SKINK
(LANKASCINCUS GREERI)

The golden red-bronze, Greer's Lanka Skink was discovered as recently as 2007. It is endemic, very rare and tiny - barely 42 mm – and has been documented as living in Sri Lanka's south-western lowland.

16
HALY'S TREE
SKINK
(DASIA HALIANA)

Until recently thought to be resident rather than endemic, Haly's Tree Skink bears four feet and four toes on each limb. It is 80mm long, and is categorised as being Near Threatened. It bears such striking horizontal dark brown stripes across its golden bronze back as to have won itself a place on one of Sri Lanka's stamps.

17
LAYARD'S SNAKE
SKINK
(NESSIA LAYARDI)

Legless, critically endangered, and endemic, little is known about this rare skink that inhabits the Central Province and the wetter parts of the country's coastline. Even its tiny size is mildly disputed.

18

MANY-KEELED GRASS SKINK

(*EUTROPIS CARINATA* / *EUTROPIS
LANKAE*)

Also known as the Golden Skink or the Keeled Indian Mabuya, The Many-Keeled Grass Skink was recently declared endemic to Sri Lanka. Subtly decorated in stripes on yellow, black, brown, and bronze, it is, at around 121mm, something of a titan amongst skinks. Given how super productive it is in the egg laying department (it lays up to 20 eggs a year), and its willingness to live almost anywhere below 1000 meters, it is more than likely that it will be found to be widespread across the island.

19

MUNINDRADASA'S
LANKA SKINK
(*LANKASCINCUS MUNINDRADASAI*)

Discovered only recently - around 2007 –
and not seen outside Adam's Peak, this
endemic skink is exceptionally rare, albeit
tiny (40mm) and visually unexceptional with
dull bronze skin, four feet and four matching
toes.

20
SAMEERA'S
LANKA SKINK
(*LANKASCINCUS SAMEERAI*)

Discovered only in 2007, this endemic skink is a burnished bronze in colour, with flecks of grey and yellow. It is a tiny 35mm but little else is currently known about it.

21
SARASINS'
SNAKE SKINK
(NESSIA SARASINORUM)

Large (up to 92mm) and almost entirely legless (its so-called back legs are mere buds) , this bronze-coloured endemic skink is found right across most of the drier parts of Sri Lanka.

22

SHARK-HEADED SNAKE SKINK

(NESSIA HICKANALA)

So little is known about this endemic skink that the IUCN refrains from even attempting to offer a suggestion as to how threatened it is from a conservation perspective. It is known to inhabit the dry lands in the northwest of the island including Wilpattu. It lacks any limbs but has a head mildly similar to that of a benign shark. Its 60mm long body is reddish to dark bronze in colour.

23
SMITH'S SNAKE
SKINK
(NESSIA BIPES)

Known from a very few sightings in hillier parts of the central province and around the Knuckles mountains, this endemic skink is so obscure as to leave the IUCN Red List little option but keep blank its conservation status, though it is known to lay up to 4 eggs a year. A reddish bronze, its hind feet are mere buds with and its forelegs entirely absent.

24
SPECKLED FOREST
SKINK
(EUTROPIS MACULARIA)

Also known as The Bronze Mabuya, and The Bronze Grass Skink, it is shy but abundant right across south and southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka. It has a dazzling bozine body and produces up to 6 eggs a year. It is quite large – around 70 mm, very territorial and shows a marked preference for forest or grassy habitats of 1000 meters or more.

25
SRI LANKA
SUPPLE SKINK
(LYGOSOMA SINGHA)

Little is known about this endemic skink except that, in skink terms, it is a Goliath having been measured on at least one occasion to grow to 78mm. It has four tiny legs and four rather stumpy toes and has been little seen outside the low-lying scrub of the northeast coasts of the island.

26

SRI LANKA
BRONZE SKINK
(EUTROPIS MADARASZI)

Barley anywhere in Sri Lanka, the highest of the highlands expected, is off limits to the endemic Sri Lanka Bronze Skink. A little on the large size at around 70mm, its fecund egg laying habit (it puts down about half a dozen eggs a year) helps ensure that this species is more than able to weather whatever is thrown at it. It is golden bronze with a dark side strip along its length.

27
TAMMANNA
SKINK
(EUTROPIS TAMMANNA)

Smallish in size (around 52mm), the endemic Tammanna Skink has a reputation for cannibalism. Preferring low country it is widespread through Sri Lanka and is coloured a dull bronze with darker speckled sides.

28
TAYLOR'S
LANKA SKINK
(*LANKASCINCUS TAYLORI*)

Tiny – 43 mm in length – Taylor's Lanka Skink is still relatively commonplace in such mountainous areas as Sinharaja, the Knuckles, Gampola, and Hantana. Endemic, it is bronze in colour with a faint stripe down the length of its body.

29
TOELESS SNAKE
SKINK
(NESSIA MONODACTYLA)

Legless, and black-bronze in colour, this endemic skink's relatively generous egg production (2 per year) has helped ensure it is well distributed across Sri Lanka, especially in the high forested parts of Kandy.

30
TWO-TOED
NESSIA
(NESSIA DIDACTYLA)

An engendered endemic skink around 80mm in length. Although fond of forests ranging from 500 to 12000 meters, it has also been spotted in coconut plantations. Light brown in colour, its tiny legs each sport two toes.

31

SEASHORE SKINK

(EUTROPIS NIBRONILI)

Sometimes known also as Bibron's Skink, it lives a reasonably unthreatened life along both India and Sri Lanka's coasts and sand dunes. It has managed to find its way inland too – even into hills of 500 meters. It has black and yellow markings on its sleek bronze body, and 4 little feet, each with four toes. It is at the smaller end of skink sizes, being little more than 50mm.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Swarbrick is a publisher, planter, hotelier, hermit, and writer.

He was born in Colombo and raised, with few concessions to modernity, in India, Singapore, and the Middle East. Cornish, he gained his degrees on the Celtic fringe: at the Universities of Wales, and Stirling, prolonging an introduction to accepted working hours for as long as was decently possible.

Having worked at News Corp's HarperCollins UK as board director for various otherwise homeless departments including sales, art and marketing; and HarperCollins India, he ran Hachette's consumer learning division. Prior to this, he launched Oxford University Press's first commercial online business, Oxford Reference Online.

When the doubtful charms of boardroom bawls, bottom lines, and divas diminished, he returned to Sri Lanka, the land of his birth hundreds of years earlier, to rescue a spice plantation and set of art deco buildings that had gone feral in the jungle.

Today, as The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel, it has become one of the country's top ten boutique hotels, run by the kindest and most professional of hospitality teams; and overseen by several small schnauzers.

It also helps fund The Ceylon Press, set up to make Sri Lanka's rich and complicated story, a mystery to many, and a secret to most, more accessible. The Press' books, companions, podcasts, blogs, and guides are freely available at theceylonpress.com. The Press also publishes Poetry from the Jungle, a podcast that recasts the orthodox view of the world's best poets and poems.

ABOUT THE FLAME TREE ESTATE & HOTEL

"It's absolute paradise," wrote one guest recently; "I would fly back to Sri Lanka simply to stay in this place for a couple more days."

Centered on a 25-acre organic spice and timber plantation, The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel has been renovated and furnished with art & antiques; its healthy menus fusing street food with fine dining.

Its 1,000 high rocky hills stalled the Dutch army in 1765; and until the civil war the estate stretched over 100 acres with 3 working elephants.

Today its restored plantations grow cardamom, turmeric, ginger, cloves, pepper, cocoa; rubber, coffee, vanilla; cinnamon, coconuts - and scores of trees from ebony to sapu – best enjoyed from the vantage point of the hotel's infinity pool. Visit www.flametreeestate.com.

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