

LIVING WORLD

Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago
Field Naturalists' Club

admin@ttfnc.org

ISSN 1029-3299



The Greater Windward Skink, *Copeoglossum aurae* (Reptilia: Squamata: Mabuyidae), a Semi-Arboreal Lizard of the Eastern Caribbean

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Murphy, J.C., Charles, S., Rutherford, M., Anton, T., Hast, G., Reynolds, B., Traub, J., and White, G. 2013. The Greater Windward Skink, *Copeoglossum aurae* (Reptilia: Squamata: Mabuyidae), a Semi-Arboreal Lizard of the Eastern Caribbean. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2013, 57-58.

Murphy, J.C., Charles, S., Rutherford, M., Anton, T., Hast, G., Reynolds, B., Traub, J., and White, G. 2013. The Greater Windward Skink, *Copeoglossum aurae* (Reptilia: Squamata: Mabuyidae), a Semi-Arboreal Lizard of the Eastern Caribbean. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2013, 57-58.

The Greater Windward Skink, *Copeoglossum aurae* (Reptilia: Squamata: Mabuyidae), a Semi-Arboreal Lizard of the Eastern Caribbean

Two mabuyid skinks are present in Trinidad and Tobago, the Greater Windward Skink, *Copeoglossum aurae* Hedges and Conn and the Lesser Windward Skink, *Mari-sora aurulae* Hedges and Conn. Both lizards have a similar distribution in the southern Windward Islands, including St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the Peninsula de Paria of Venezuela, with a great deal of sympatry throughout the range.

Distinguishing between the two species of Trinidad and Tobago skinks is difficult. The Greater Windward Skink usually has the parietal scales separated, a heavily spotted dorsum, and a dorsolateral stripe that extends to the hind legs and onto the tail. The Lesser Windward Skink has the parietal scales in contact, few spots on the dorsum, and a dorsolateral stripe that fades on the posterior body (Hedges and Conn 2012).

Since 2010 we have been conducting field surveys of amphibians and reptiles in Trinidad and Tobago and have noted *Copeoglossum aurae* is frequently off the ground, in trees, bushes, or on anthropogenic structures, suggesting that it is arboreal. In 2011 we observed one specimen suspected to be this species that was about three meters above the ground on a tree stump in central Tobago. In 2012 we found a specimen about 1.5 m above the ground in a small tree in the Arima Valley; on Tobago a specimen was found on a concrete wall about 0.75 meters above the ground; and another specimen was found near Corvo Point, Tobago under loose tree bark about one meter above the ground. One individual assumed to be this species was observed 10 m above ground in a tree in the Lopinot Valley.

Additional evidence of the arboreal nature of this lizard is provided by a photograph showing a specimen being eaten by the Vine Snake, *Oxybelis aeneus*, on the trail to the top of Mt. St. Benedict in Trinidad (Fig. 1). The skink and its predator were about 0.6 m above the ground. And, a second photograph (Fig. 2) shows a pair of the lizards in copula about 1.6 to 2 m above the ground. There seems little doubt that the Greater Windward Skink is spending much of its time in the trees. Two of us have observed this skink on the ground in the leaf litter, under rocks and logs in open forested habitats; suggesting it is not completely arboreal.

Skinks likely evolved arboreal habits multiple times. The large Solomon Islands skink (*Corucia zeburata*) is an arboreal species (McCoy 2006), as are at least some of the South East Asian skinks, including the genera *Vietnascincus*, *Lamprolepis*, and *Dasia* (Greer 1970; Das 2004; Darevsky and Orlov 2011) and some of the North Ameri-



Fig. 1. The Vine Snake, *Oxybelis aeneus*, feeding on *Copeoglossum aurae*, Mt. St. Benedict. BR.



Fig. 2. A pair of *Copeoglossum aurae* in copula on a tree trunk in the Lopinot Valley.

can skinks in the genus *Plestiodon* (Cooper and Vitt 1994). Given the difficulty of surveying arboreal microhabitats, this skink may be more common than previously thought.

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