

Copeoglossum aurae (Greater Windward Skink)

Family: Scincidae (Skinks)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Greater windward skink, *Copeoglossum aurae*.

[<http://www.trinidad-tobagoherps.org/Mabuyanigropunctata.htm>, downloaded 16 October 2016]

TRAITS. *Copeoglossum aurae* is a newly discovered skink in Trinidad and Tobago (Hedges and Conn, 2012). It has a dark lateral solid stripe that extends from under its oval shaped ear past its hind legs onto the tail (Fig. 1). *C. aurae* male and female specimens can reach a maximum of 98.5mm and 109mm snout-vent length, respectively, and tails can reach up to 65mm. They are heavily scaled lizards with scales being smaller on the limbs in comparison to other body parts. Their tails, like some other reptiles, can be broken off and regenerated. The dorsal colour of most specimens are greyish-green with small to medium deep brown spots evenly spread on the body, limbs and tail. The dorsal colours are different shades of brown, grey and green, and green-white lateral stripes are found from the ear to the hind limbs (Hedges and Conn, 2012).

DISTRIBUTION. *Copeoglossum aurae* species is distributed in some islands of the Caribbean including southern Windward Islands like St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, and it was postulated that some may have migrated to parts of South America (Venezuela) (Murphy et al., 2013).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. *C. aurae* exhibit both arboreal and non-arboreal characteristics, since they are found either on trees or on the ground (Murphy et al., 2013). Their habitats in Trinidad includes rainforest areas, coconut trash, and cultivated and disturbed areas (Murphy, 1997). In the Grenadines, these skinks have been found usually on the forest floors, in woody undergrowth, in cacti and on tree trunks (Daudin & de Silva, 2007). Because of the invasive

introduction of the mongoose before the 1930s, most if not all skinks were extinct in Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Black rats and snakes (Fig. 2a) are also known to be predators of this skink species (Barbour, 1930). *C. aurae* is a widespread skink in Trinidad but its population levels are low (Hedges and Conn, 2012). Skinks of this species are crepuscular since they enjoy the sunrise, but stay hidden during the day. Not much is published on reproduction of *C. aurae*, however two female specimens (93.0 and 95.3 mm SVL) collected in May and March contained one and three developing young, respectively (Hedges and Conn, 2012).

BEHAVIOUR. In the Lopinot Valley in Trinidad, a picture was taken showing a male and female *C. aurae* mating on a tree trunk (Fig. 2b; Murphy et al., 2013). In Venezuela, groups of this species were found on the mainland of the Sucre peninsula. *C. aurae* is sympatric with *Marisora aurulae* with both of the skink species having similar distributions in the Caribbean islands. In the Grenadines and Tobago, the both species have been spotted together on the same date and by the same researcher. It is not known whether both species share the same microhabitat (Hedges and Conn, 2012).

APPLIED BOLOGY. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has assessed *Copeoglossum aurae* as Vulnerable. Some of its threats includes the invasive mongoose and black rat that had caused the population of this skink to not only decline in the Caribbean countries but also to become extinct in Grenada and St Vincent. Another major threat listed was urbanization and deforestation which in turn causes habitat destruction (Hedges and Conn, 2012).

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. a) *C. aurae* specimen being consumed by *Oxybelis aeneus* on a branch in Mt. St. Benedict, Trinidad. b) Pair of *C. aurae* mating on a tree in Lopinot Valley, Trinidad.

[<http://ttfnc.org/livworld/lw2013/2013p57murphy.pdf>, downloaded 17 October 2016]

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