

Gymnophthalmus underwoodi (Shiny Lizard)

Family: Gymnophthalmidae (Spectacled Lizards)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Shiny lizard, *Gymnophthalmus underwoodi*.

[<http://www.lesfruitsdemer.org/guides/the-incomplete-guide-to-the-wildlife-of-saint-martin/reptiles/>, downloaded 12 March 2015]

TRAITS. It has a long body that is accompanied by an even longer tail; the back is shiny and tan with the sides darker (Fig. 1). There are only four toes present on the front feet, and no ridged scales on the tail. The lower eyelids are transparent giving them the ability to see with closed eyes (Fig. 2), and the family the name spectacled lizards. The adults are only 1.2g in weight with a body length ranging from 36-43mm. This is a parthenogenetic (virgin birth), unisexual species in which all individuals are females (Les fruits de mer.org, 2009); hatchling body length range 16-19mm. They undergo continuous reproduction all year round and maturity occurs seven months after hatching (Hardy et al., 1989).

DISTRIBUTION. Found in the West Indies islands including Trinidad and Tobago, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Maarten, Barbados, Dominica, and Grenada and also in the northeastern part of South America, Brazil, French Guiana, Suriname and Guyana. It is native to Trinidad and Tobago (Doan, 2010).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. This is a terrestrial species that is often found in open, sunny areas that result from human modification like parks and gardens, in which it lives among the grass. Sometimes it can also be located in areas near a forest (Les fruits de mer.org, 2015). They are in fact found in disturbed habitats and are well adapted to these environments. Having a long and slender tail that is easily broken serves as an advantage for *G. underwoodi* in escaping their predators. They are also very fast which enables them to escape capture through running and sharply turning and going through the grass.

FOOD AND FEEDING. The size of lizards and by extension most animals determine the type of food they eat. *Gymnophthalmus underwoodi* being so small eats mainly termites and other small insects (Bauer, 1998). As insectivores they belong to the third trophic level.

REPRODUCTION. They reproduce through parthenogenesis (does not require sperm) and are an all-female species (unisexual). They can lay approximately 11 eggs within a 4-month period, with a clutch size of 1-4 eggs. The average egg size is 9.4 x 6.5mm with a weight of 0.23g and takes approximately 61 days to develop. The hatchlings have a body length of 16-19mm, a tail length of 18-25mm, and weigh 0.09-0.14g (Hardy et al., 1989). They undergo continuous reproduction throughout the year and seven months after they are hatched they become mature. They live for up to 4 years and 5 months.

APPLIED ECOLOGY. *Gymnophthalmus underwoodi* is not listed in the IUCN because of its widespread distribution. They are also not experiencing any major population decline and as a result there are no conservation measures in place or needed (Doan, 2010).

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Shiny lizard displaying the lower transparent eyelids.

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