



*Championing UK's most special species:
the wildlife of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and
Crown Dependencies (CDs)*

FACT-SHEET ON:

Bermuda Skink *Plestiodon longirostris*
UK Overseas Territory: Bermuda

The Bermuda Rock Skink is the only endemic terrestrial vertebrate on the isolated archipelago of Bermuda. It is a relatively primitive 'relict' species and is identifiable from Pleistocene deposits on Bermuda.

Once common throughout Bermuda, Skink populations have declined throughout the archipelago, and is now classified by IUCN as Critically Endangered. Habitat loss has undoubtedly been a major factor over much of the area, but introduced and even reintroduced species have had serious impacts. On islands not impacted by introduced species, there has been significant mortality due to pollution. The last remaining viable subpopulation appears to be the one on Southampton Island which comprises about 400 individuals (about 240 mature individuals). Other subpopulations include those on Nonsuch Island (23 individuals), Inner Pear Island (52), Charles Island (123), Palm Island (44) and a mainland reserve site at Spittal Pond (124).

Not much is known about the ecology of this species, but it appears that it may have a long generation length. It is thought that some individuals from a toe-clipping study were still being observed 27 years later. Hatchlings are believed to be strictly insectivorous, but the diet then switches to carrion, which is primarily collected from seabird nests (includes broken eggs, dead chicks, and regurgitated fish and squid).

The major threat has undoubtedly been habitat loss due to expanding agriculture (17% of the area) and homes and gardens (50% of the area). However, there has also been evidence of sharp declines in reserve areas with restored vegetation. These declines have been attributed to predation by introduced and reintroduced species. These include Kiskadees *Pitangus sulphuratus* (lizard-eating birds deliberately introduced in 1957 to control anoles), Night Herons *Nyctanassa violacea* (reintroduced to replace long-extinct native herons in 1976-78), Jamaican Anoles *Anolis grahami* (introduced in 1905 to control scale insects on crops), and Cane Toads *Rhinella marina* (a predatory species introduced to control cockroaches).



The Critically Endangered Bermuda Skink Plestiodon longirostris
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On islands not impacted by introduced species but easily accessible to people, high mortality has been attributed to the large number of discarded bottles and drink cans. Lizards are attracted to the bottles and cans, and then become trapped and are killed by the heat of the sun; their carcasses in turn attracting more lizards.

There is no legislation specifically to protect this species. However, there have been campaigns to raise awareness amongst the public. The preparation of the *Bermuda Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan* will hopefully lead to a Management Plan being developed for this species. Attempts are being made also to establish a captive population. In order to safeguard the last remaining viable subpopulation on Southampton Island, it is essential that efforts are made to minimise any human impacts on the island, and that introductions of predatory species are prevented.