

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

GILBERT'S SKINK

Plestiodon gilberti

Family: SCINCIDAE
R037

Order: SQUAMATA

Class: REPTILIA

Written by: S. Morey

Reviewed by: T. Papenfuss

Edited by: R. Duke

Updated by: CWHR Program Staff, March 2000

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A common but seldom observed lizard, the Gilbert's skink is found in the northern San Joaquin Valley, in the Sierra Nevada Foothills from Yuba Co. southward, and along the inner flanks of the Coast Ranges from San Francisco Bay to the Mexican border. It is also found in the mountains of southern California, and at scattered mountain localities in the eastern deserts from Mono Co. to San Bernardino Co. Its elevational range is from sea level to at least 2220 m (7300 ft) (Stebbins 1985). Found in a wide variety of habitats, this lizard is most common in early successional stages or open areas within habitats in which it occurs. Heavy brush and densely forested areas are generally avoided.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: This skink, like the western skink, forages through leaf litter and dense vegetation, occasionally digging through loose soil. Stebbins (1954) suggested that its food habits are similar to those of the western skink, which takes a large percentage of ground dwelling insects.

Cover: Cover for these secretive lizards is provided by rotting logs, surface litter, and large flat stones. Gilbert's skinks are good burrowers and often construct their own shelters by burrowing under surface objects.

Reproduction: Females construct nest chambers in loose moist soil several cm deep under surface objects, especially flat rocks.

Water: No information on water requirements. In the laboratory individuals survive best when substrates are kept somewhat moist.

Pattern: Commonest in early successional stages or open areas within habitats in which it occurs. Heavy brush and densely forested areas are generally avoided.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: The similar western skink has been studied by Tanner (1957), who found that when summers are hot most activity is concentrated into the warming hours of morning and the cooling hours of afternoon. Adult skinks usually become inactive by early fall, but juveniles extend the period of activity several weeks.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Predictable seasonal movements have not been reported for this species in California.

Home Range: There is little information on the exact nature of the home range in this

skink. Studying the related skink (*E. fasciatus*) in Kansas, Fitch and von Achen (1977) found that females guarding eggs had extremely small home ranges of 0.005 ha (0.01 ac). During the rest of the year females had home ranges averaging 0.09 ha (0.2 ac), only a little less than those of males. Home ranges apparently are not fixed in space but are subject to constant revision including complete relocation at times.

Territory: Little information exists regarding the existence of male territoriality in this species. In the similar western skink, Tanner (1943,1957) reported that females stay in the vicinity of egg clutches and sometimes actively guard the eggs from intruders.

Reproduction: The reproductive season for this species varies geographically and from year to year depending on local conditions. Little is known about the timing of reproduction, but it is probably similar to the western skink, with mating in the spring, and eggs deposited from June to August (Stebbins 1954, Tanner 1957). Clutch size ranges from 3 to 9 (Stebbins 1954, Punzo 1982).

Niche: Skinks are probable food items of a wide variety of snakes, birds, and mammals. Some competition for food or space may occur with the western skink where the two species coexist.

REFERENCES

- Fitch, H. S., and P. L. Von Achen. 1977. Spatial relationships and seasonality in the skinks *eumeces fasciatus* and *scincella laterale* in northeastern Kansas. *Herpetologica* 33: 303-313.
- Punzo, F. 1982. Clutch and egg size in several species of lizards from the desert southwest. *J. Herpetol.* 16:414-417.
- Stebbins, R. C. 1954. *Amphibians and reptiles of western North America*. McGraw-hill, New York. 536pp.
- Stebbins, R. C. 1972. *California amphibians and reptiles*. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 152pp.
- Stebbins, R. C. 1985. *A field guide to western reptiles and amphibians*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Massachusetts. 336 pp.
- Tanner, W. W. 1943. Notes on the life history of *eumeces skiltonianus skiltonianus*. *Great Basin Nat.* 4:81-88.
- Tanner, W. W. 1957. A taxonomic and ecological study of the western skink (*eumeces skiltonianus*). *Great Basin Nat.* 17:59-94.

R037

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHRR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. *California's Wildlife*. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.