

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Look for it now in Southwest Ohio!

6/21/2021



Photos by Dave Woehr. Left to Right: Female Five-Lined Skink, Male Five-Lined Skink, Broad-Headed Skink.

Skinks (*Plestiodon* sp.)

By Dave Woehr, Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist

When thinking about reptiles in Ohio, turtles and snakes are the first things that come to most folks' minds. But what about lizards? There are about 90 species of lizards in America, most of which are native to the Southwest. There are four lizard species native to Ohio, and one exotic species that has become established.

Here in Warren County, just two lizard species are likely to be seen if you are lucky enough to spot one before it sees you and scampers for cover into thick foliage, a stack of wood, a rock pile, or a handy crevice. Our local lizards belong to a family called skinks. Warren County is known to have both five-lined and broad-headed skinks.

The five-lined skink is the more common Warren County species. It gets its name from five very distinct light-colored lines that run the full length of its otherwise dark body from head to tail. Juveniles exhibit a bright blue body before it darkens with age.

The larger and less common broad-headed skink gets its name from its wide jaws, giving the head a triangular appearance. Adult males are brown or olive brown in color and have bright orange heads during the mating season in spring. Females have five light stripes running down the back and the tail, similar to the five-lined skink. The broad-headed skink is essentially a woodland inhabitant. It is found only in a few Ohio counties and is rare even in those locations. Occasionally, broad-headed skinks can be observed high in the branches of dead trees. They have the distinction of being the most arboreal of Ohio's lizards.

FUN FACTS

- Prominent characteristics of reptiles include scales and claws. As expected, skinks also exhibit these traits.
- Skinks are beneficial, feeding largely on insects such as grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, and various insect larvae.
- They use their tongues to sniff the air and track their prey.
- When they encounter their prey, they chase it down until they corner it or manage to land a bite and then swallow it whole. They can be voracious hunters.
- Adult skinks in our region range in size from about 6-inches to a foot in length.
- Skinks have long, tapering tails that they can shed if predators grab onto them. They can regenerate the lost part of a tail, though imperfectly. A lost tail can grow back within three to four months.
- Young skinks hatch from eggs in a nest that is hidden and well-guarded by their mother. Nests often contain a dozen or more eggs.
- To learn more about skinks and other lizards, visit the [Ohio Division of Wildlife's Reptiles of Ohio field guide](#).