

First Sighting – Date: _____ **Location:** _____



Five-lined Skink (*Eumeces fasciatus*)

One of only three lizards commonly seen in Northern Virginia, this skink goes through quite a visual metamorphosis as it moves through its active life. It starts out just a few inches long with a brilliant blue tail and black, cream-striped body. Once it reaches its 2nd or 3rd year the tail loses its turquoise coloring and begins to turn tan along with the body. Mature adults lose most of their stripes and gain a bright, orange-red wash over their head and neck. Cold-blooded reptiles, skinks hatch from eggs laid in rotting logs or loose soil and then spend much of their lives warming themselves in the sun. They love to bask on logs, trees and rocks. When fall days cease to be warm they burrow down to hibernate until late April. Once warm, they dash, dart, climb and scurry after many invertebrates, such as grasshoppers, slugs, cockroaches, caterpillars, beetles, spiders and termites. Excellent predators, beneficial guests to any landscape and harmless to people, they're a treat to host in your yard. They're also an important food for hawks, snakes and weasels, all beneficial predators themselves, which is why skinks have a surprising defense – if attacked, their tail may break off and thrash around as the unharmed lizard gets away, soon to heal and grow a new tail. Lawnmowers, pesticides, outdoor cats and habitat destruction are the main threats to this beautiful reptile.

What Skinks Need

Food: Insects, spiders, slugs, millipedes, worms, young mice and other lizards. To find food skinks hunt the forest floor and sometimes climb shrubs and trees.

Breeding: Skinks lay eggs in stumps, rotting logs and loose soil in moist woodlands. The female stays to guard them.

How You Can Help

- Create an insect garden with native wildflowers, grasses and shrubs
- Place a few old logs and rocks round the edges of the garden paths
- Reduce or eliminate pesticide use
- Skinks need fallen trees, old logs, rotting stumps; try not to remove all down wood. Create a skink nursery - allow a corner of your yard to hold a few old logs and thick leaf mulch.

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Shelter: Thick underbrush, fallen trees, rock outcroppings, standing dead trees, down branches

- Place rock piles or log shelters, dense shrub plantings or hedgerows and old branch clusters along the edges or in the corners of your yard.

Other: Two other less common skinks found in Northern Virginia are the Broad-headed (*Eumeces laticeps*) and the Southeastern Five-lined (*Eumeces inexpectatus*), both of which are slightly more arboreal and can tolerate drier woodlands than *E. fasciatus*. Other than that, their habits and needs are very much the same and all three are harmless and beneficial. Slight differences in head scale patterns, body striping and jaw width separate them, but general appearances are almost identical.



mature adult

photos by Kevin Munroe

- Remember, skinks love to sunbathe, so be sure to place a few rocks, logs or branches in *sunny* corners of your yard
- Keeping cats indoors, reducing pesticides and allowing corners of your yard or garden to go unmowed will help create a safe space for these brightly-colored, insect-eating guests.



young adult

Resources:

Native plants — available at DeBaggio Herbs, Nature by Design, Merrifield Garden Centers and other nurseries

Model Habitat and Observation Sites:

Prince William Forest Park — www.nps.gov/prwi/
 Huntley Meadows Park - www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/huntley/
 Riverbend Park - www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/riverbend/

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