

Reading between the lines



Five-lined Skink

(*Plestiodon fasciatus*)

A five-lined skink has skin that is brown to black in color, appears smooth and shiny and is blanketed with five broad, light-colored stripes running the length of their body. They look like the “referee” of the lizard world. With a range covering nearly two-thirds of Pennsylvania, these skinks can be found from the northwest corner in Crawford County to the southeast corner in Bucks County.

In some adults, the lined pattern may fade. People sometimes confuse the five-lined skink with the broadhead skink, but the five-lined skink is much smaller. During mating season, the male five-lined skink will display a similar bright-red or orange-colored head as the broadhead skink.

Young five-lined skinks have tails that are an amazing bright blue color. This tail helps them avoid becoming dinner. Predators will attack the brightly colored tail, and it will detach and wiggle around while the young skink escapes, leaving the predator with only the tail. The tail will grow back in time, but it will be shorter and gray in color.



Five-lined Skink

Home gardens are ideal habitat for five-lined skinks. However, they favor humid woodlands with plenty of decayed matter. Like other skinks, they spend most of their time under the cover of rocks and logs. When they hatch in July, they are only about 2-inches long but will grow 5- to 8-inches long.

Although many people think they stay on the ground (terrestrial), this skink will climb a decayed tree to find an insect meal. They also enjoy meals of spiders, larvae, worms and small mice.



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