

New record of the long-tailed sun skink in Singapore

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Subject: Long-tailed sun skink, *Eutropis longicaudata* (Reptilia: Squamata: Scincidae).

Subject identified by: Andrew Tay & Kelvin K. P. Lim.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Choa Chu Kang, Muslim Cemetery; 10 April 2019; 1100 hrs.

Habitat: Open parkland. Cemetery with annually trimmed ornamental shrubs, wild trees, grasses and wildflowers.

Observers: Nor Aishah Mohamed Rashid and Andrew Tay.

Observation: An example of about 30 cm total length was found crawling about on the ground in the cemetery. As the observers followed it to have a better look, the lizard crept under a bushy shrub and then climbed up the plant. It stopped among a tangle of branches about 40 cm above the ground where the accompanying photographs were obtained (Fig. 1 & 2).

Remarks: The long-tailed sun skink is differentiated from the locally common many-lined sun skink (*Eutropis multifasciata*) and other congeners in the Malay Peninsula in having no post-nasal scale, three post-supralabial scales, presence of post-mental scale, and a relatively long tail that is almost twice as long as its snout-vent length. The scales on its dorsum have two or three weak keels. Its colour pattern is distinctive and quite diagnostic. The back of the body, head, limbs and tail are bronze. There is a well-defined broad dark brown lateral stripe with small white spots on each side of its body that stretches from the eye to the front part of the tail. This stripe is sharply highlighted below by a whitish section on the head and body. The species reaches almost 12 cm in snout-vent length, and is distributed from southern China and Taiwan, southwards through Indochina and Thailand, to Peninsular Malaysia as far south as southern Pahang and Pulau Tioman. This lizard usually inhabits open, low-lying disturbed grassy areas (Grismer, 2011: 563-565).

This seems to be the first record of *Eutropis longicaudata* in Singapore. It is the third species of the genus *Eutropis* in the country. The other two species are the native many-lined sun skink (*Eutropis multifasciata*) which is locally common, and the striped sun skink (*Eutropis rugifera*) which is locally rare and confined to forest (see Baker & Lim, 2012). The three species can be told apart by their colour pattern, with the two native species either lacking the dark lateral stripe, or having one that is not sharply demarcated especially along the lower margin (see Baker & Lim, 2012: 86-87).

Because of its preference for open scrubby areas, and also because the species was not recorded in Singapore in the past (see Baker & Lim, 2012; Grismer, 2011), it is likely that the long-tailed sun skink is not native there. If it is introduced, the mode of its arrival is not certain. There is a strong possibility of it being accidentally imported with ornamental plants or other agricultural products from neighbouring Malaysia. From this single individual observed, it would be premature to tell if there is an established population of the long-tailed sun skink in Singapore. Graves were being exhumed in the part of the cemetery where the featured lizard was sighted. It is believed that the area was undergoing redevelopment.

References:

- Baker, N. & K. K. P. Lim, 2012. *Wild Animals of Singapore. A Photographic Guide to Mammals, Reptiles, Amphibians and Freshwater Fishes*. Updated edition. Draco Publishing and Distribution Pte. Ltd. and Nature Society (Singapore). 180 pp.
- Grismer, L. L., 2011. *Lizards of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, and their Adjacent Archipelagos. Their Description, Distribution, and Natural History*. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main. 728 pp.



Fig. 1: A dorso-lateral view of the long-tailed sun skink when it was staying still within a mass of branches in the shrubbery.



Fig. 1: A lateral view of the same lizard as it was perched on a branch. Note the well-defined brown lateral stripe with white spots.

Photographs by Andrew Tay