

Brown tree skinks at MacRitchie forest

Subjects: Brown tree skink, *Dasia grisea* (Reptilia: Sauria: Scincidae).

Subjects identified by: Contributor.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Central Catchment Nature Reserve, MacRitchie forest, near Bukit Kalang and off Venus Drive near Singapore Island Country Club; 6 August 2014 and 6 & 14 July 2011; 14:00 and 1855 hrs.

Habitat: Primary and secondary lowland dipterocarp forest.

Observer: Contributor.

Observation: Three separate individuals are herein featured.

1) On 6 August 2014 at 1400 hrs, an example of about 25cm total length, was observed outside a hole on the large trunk of a tree, at about 1.5m off the ground (Fig. 1). It was in primary lowland dipterocarp forest near Bukit Kalang. The skink did not move at first, but retired into the tree hole when the contributor approached the animal for a closer look.

2) Three years earlier, on 6 July 2011 at 1854 hrs, another example, also of about 25cm total length, was found at the edge of primary forest off Venus Drive, on a large tree trunk with many holes, at about 30cm off the ground (Fig. 2). Up to August 2014, the contributor had seen a brown tree skink, apparently the same individual, on a number of subsequent occasions on the very same tree. On an interesting note, this skink has only ever been seen between 1800 and 1900 hrs. At other times it was believed to be resting within a hole on the tree into which it retired when approached too closely.

3) On 14 July 2011 at 1855 hrs, one of about 30cm total length, was seen approximately 100 m away from the second example (Fig. 3) in secondary forest off Venus Drive, on a tree with a narrow trunk. At first this individual was observed feeding, presumably on small insects, on the tree trunk. It retired into a hole positioned very close to the ground in that same tree when approached.

Remarks: The brown tree skink is an arboreal and diurnally active lizard that is locally confined to the Bukit Timah and Central Catchment Nature Reserves (Baker & Lim, 2012: 84), and regarded as an 'endangered' species in Singapore (Lim, 2008: 265). The featured observation indicates that it seeks shelter in holes and crevices on trees.

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.
- Lim, K. K. P., 2008. Checklists of threatened species: fishes, amphibians and reptiles. In: Davison, G. W. H., P. K. L. Ng & H. C. Ho (eds.). *The Singapore Red Data Book. Threatened Plants & Animals of Singapore*. Second Edition. The Nature Society (Singapore). pp. 263-266.

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Fig. 1. Brown tree skink (far right) outside a hole on a tree trunk on 6 August 2014 at 1400 hrs.



Fig. 2. Brown tree skink on a trunk covered with numerous tree holes on 6 July 2011 at 1854 hrs. Fig. 3. Brown tree skink observed feeding on insect on 14 July 2011 at 1855 hrs.

Photographs by David Groenewoud