REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

First Record of the Ponmudi Skink, *Eutropis clivicola* (Inger, Shaffer, Koshy, and Bakde 1984), from Karnataka, India

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We conducted a rapid faunistic survey on the campus of Mangalore University, Karnataka, India (12.81954, 74.92719) on 17–21 December 2024. During this survey, we encountered a population of skinks in the University's botanical garden, situated near the Science Block. The garden is characterized by a dense canopy dominated by tree species such as Kindal (*Terminalia paniculata*), Burmese Ironwood (*Xylia xylocarpa*), and Indian Beech (*Pongamia pinnata*) with an understory comprised of a diverse mix of Persian Shield (*Strobilanthus* sp.), Bamboo (*Bambusa* spp.), reeds (*Ochlandra* spp.), and canes (*Calamus* spp.). We collected two specimens of the skink, and, based on coloration and a distinct dark narrow vertebral stripe (Datta-Roy 2014; Deuti et al. 2020), we identified them as *Eutropis clivicola* (Ponmudi Skink, also known as Inger's Mabuya or Mountain Skink) (Fig. 1), a species first described by Inger et al. (1984) from Kerala. A specimen was deposited in the National Voucher Specimen Register of the Western Ghat Regional Centre, Zoological Survey of India, Kozhikode, Kerala (Register No. ZSI/WGRC/I.-V. 3828) and the identity of the species was confirmed by Dr. Kaushik Deuti. The nearest previous records for *E. clivicola* are Madayipara, a midland laterite hillock area, and the Valayamchal Area of Aralam Wildlife Sanctuary, Kannur District, both in Kerala, which are respectively about 115 km southwest and 150 km southeast of the Mangalore University campus.

These skinks foraged actively among the thick leaf litter for insects by day, but were elusive, with even minor disturbances causing them to rapidly disappear into the litter. During a 3-hour observation period on the morning of 20 December 2024, we recorded over 15 individuals in the botanical garden. Most of the larger individuals had very distinct dark middorsal lines. Lizards were most active during the sunny hours of the day, with no activity observed after 1600 h.

The Ponmudi Skink (*Eutropis clivicola*) is one of the relatively few skink species described in post-independence India. Inger et al. (1984) first reported the species in the Ponmudi Region within the Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala, at mid- to low-elevations (~260 m asl) in the Western Ghats. Subsequent reports from the Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary in Thrissur District, Kerala by Thomas and Easa (1997) indicated its presence at elevations between 148 and 250 m. More recent sightings have expanded its known range in Kerala to many districts including most of northern Kerala (Palot 2015, 2019;

Figure 1. A Ponmudi Skink (*Eutropis clivicola*) from the Mangalore University Campus, Karnataka, India. Photograph by Muhamed Jafer Palot.

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Deuti et al. 2020). Due to the species' limited distribution and few sightings, it is currently classified as Endangered (EN) on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Srinivasulu and Srinivasulu 2013; Srinivasulu et al. 2014).

Lizards on the Mangalore University campus represent the first confirmed records of *Eutropis clivicola* in Karnataka. The site is a typical midland laterite hillock at an elevation of ~120 m. Although the university campus spans ~143 ha, *E. clivicola* was observed only in densly wooded areas, particularly in the botanical garden. Other species of lizards observed during the survey were Keeled Indian Mabuyas (*E. carinata*), Oriental Garden Lizards (*Calotes versicolor*), Roux's Forest Lizards (*Monilesaurus rouxii*), Asian House Geckos (*Hemidactylus frenatus*), and Coastal Day Geckos (*Cnemaspis littoralis*).

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