

Skink Watch: Monitoring the Northern Prairie Skink on Private Land

Here are step by step instructions on how to monitor prairie skinks:

1. Locate appropriate habitat on your property. Generally prairie skinks tend to be in the following habitat:
 - open grassland, or grassland along edges of aspen forest
 - south or west facing slopes
 - sand blowouts surrounded by vegetation such as creeping juniper
 - open areas with sandy soil
 - gardens, debris or wood piles
2. Lay cover boards in habitat where prairie skinks are likely to be found. Skinks like to hide under pieces of wood or metal. Scraps of wood approximately 1 by 2 feet work well. Putting extra cover in skink habitat makes them easier to find and monitor. It is best to lay several pieces of cover in one area and to put out the cover in spring or early summer. If cover already exists (ie wood piles or debris piles) go to step 4.
3. Leave cover undisturbed for at least two weeks.
4. Check under cover boards by quickly lifting it, using a motion similar to opening a book.
5. Take note of skinks under the board, and also keep an eye for skinks running out from under it.
6. Collect information about any skinks seen (see Recording Sheet).
7. Replace cover as you found it.
8. Submit information about the sightings, using the data sheet on the following page, to the SOS website (http://www.naturenorth.com/Skink/SOS_reporting.html) or the following address:



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We appreciate any and all information you gather on the northern prairie skinks. It helps us to learn more about this fascinating and secretive animal. If you see skinks in areas away from the cover boards, please collect the same information on those sightings as you would for sightings under boards. This information is just as useful!

HELPFUL TIPS:

- In spring, when the weather is cooler, skinks can be found during the middle of the day. But when the weather is hot, it is better to survey in the morning or evening.
- Don't move cover boards around or else the skinks won't use it!
- Only check under cover every 2 weeks so skinks are not disturbed too frequently.
- Are you sure you saw a skink? Take a photo and send it to us. Follow this link to read about look-a-likes: http://www.naturenorth.com/Skink/SOS_look_like.html
- Did you see any other animals under the boards? Please let us know!
- Skinks will drop their tail if they feel trapped or stressed, so please don't try to capture the animals.
- If there is natural cover on your property, such as dead branches, check those as well.
- Be as specific as you can about location and habitat data. The more detail, the more useful it is!

Skink Information Recording Sheet



Your Name: _____
Your Address: _____
Legal Land Description: _____
Email Address: _____
Phone #: _____

Date of Survey: _____ Time of Survey: _____
Location of Survey: _____

Weather at the time of survey:
Full Sun Part Sun Full Cloud Rain
Temperature: _____

Skink Sightings:
Total number of skinks encountered: _____

Skink 1

Size : Baby/Adult/Female with eggs Colouration: Blue tail/ Orange chin/ None
Landmarks: _____ GPS coordinates: _____
Open or Under cover? Cover type: _____ Photo taken: _____

Skink 2

Size : Baby/Adult/Female with eggs Colouration: Blue tail/ Orange chin/ None
Landmarks: _____ GPS coordinates: _____
Open or Under cover? Cover type: _____ Photo taken: _____

Skink 3

Size : Baby/Adult/Female with eggs Colouration: Blue tail/ Orange chin/ None
Landmarks: _____ GPS coordinates: _____
Open or Under cover? Cover type: _____ Photo taken: _____

Skink 4

Size : Baby/Adult/Female with eggs Colouration: Blue tail/ Orange chin/ None
Landmarks: _____ GPS coordinates: _____
Open or Under cover? Cover type: _____ Photo taken: _____

What other animals were seen in the vicinity? (e.g. crickets, mice, snakes) _____

Habitat Description: _____

Privacy statement

Any information submitted information will be held in a secure access database and will not be sold or distributed to third parties. Information will only be released to authorized researchers or Manitoba Conservation, and they may contact the landowner for access permission to private lands for the benefit of prairie skink conservation, research and education. Exact locations and observer identities will not be published.

FAQs

What do prairie skinks look like?

Northern prairie skinks are small lizards with smooth scales, a short, thick neck and short legs. They measure approximately 5.0 cm to 8.5 cm in length. The back of the northern prairie skink is olive-brown with seven stripes extending from head to tail. Males are easy to tell apart from females during mating season by their bright orange cheeks and throat. Juveniles look very similar to the adults except for their distinctive bright blue tail.



Where do I find prairie skinks?

Prairie skinks are found in areas with native prairie flowers and grasses, and sandy soil. They especially like to bask on south-facing slopes. Skinks also like to hide in creeping juniper and under pieces of debris such as wood or scrap metal.

When should I survey for prairie skinks?

Skinks are active during the day from the end of April to early September, especially when it is sunny and warm. On cooler days skinks may be found under cover.

How do I survey prairie skinks?

It's easy to survey for prairie skinks, once you know how. Follow these 5 steps:

- 1) Locate a piece of debris that would be easy to lift, preferably in one piece.
- 2) Lift the piece quickly, using a motion similar to opening a book.
- 3) Check the area directly under the cover for skinks. Also look in the area surrounding the cover as skinks may run when you lift the cover.
- 4) Take note of how many skinks you see and other information (see below).
- 5) Replace the piece of cover exactly as you found it.

You don't need to catch the skinks when you see them. It stresses the animal and they may drop their tail as a result. Don't check cover more often than once every couple of weeks.

What information should I collect?

The following information is useful to prairie skink researchers:

- Information about the skink (Juvenile with blue tail, male with orange chin, female with eggs)
- Location (preferably a GPS co-ordinate)
- Type of cover
- Information about the surrounding habitat (is there open sand? Is there a lot of grass? Juniper? Shrubs? Is the cover located on a slope? Are there other animals nearby?)
- Weather (wind direction, cloud cover, temperature)
- Time of day and date

What's the difference between skinks and salamanders?

The main difference is skinks are reptiles and salamanders are amphibians. Skinks have scaly skin and look more like snakes. Salamanders have smooth skin, similar to frogs, and require moist habitat.