

**SCINCIDAE*****Cryptoblepharus africanus***

(STERNFELD, 1918)

Coral Rag Skink

**HABITAT USE****P. ZDUNEK**

The Coral Rag Skink (*Cryptoblepharus africanus*) is a small skink (maximum total length 150 mm) which is endemic to Africa, found all along the East African coast and associated islands (Tolley et al. 2023). This diurnal species naturally occurs on coral rag, foraging on old coral formations, catching insects and small crustaceans. It occasionally comes a short distance ashore, such as at the Slipway in Dar es Salaam where it has colonized the walls (Spawls et al. 2018).

On 30 January 2023 at approximately 12h20, while performing a survey for local herpetofauna, I observed a group of Coral Rag Skinks on a beachfront in Jambiani, Unguja Island, Tanzania (6° 18' 59"S, 39° 32' 50"E, QDGC 0639BC; 2 m a.s.l.). About four individuals had colonized a Coconut Palm (*Cocos nucifera*) trunk using the cracks as shelter (Fig. 1). When I approached, the lizards quickly took refuge in the cracks (about three square centimeters each). The highest observed refugia was at a height of about 2 meters above ground level. At the time of observation, it was sunny, with temperatures of 28–30°C and mild wind. The observations lasted about 1.5 hours.

To my knowledge, the use of palm trunk cracks has not been documented in the literature for Coral Rag Skinks, but these refugia appear to provide suitable microhabitat. Such trunk cracks may be particularly valuable given that they provide protection from extremely high temperatures and low humidity (depending on the season), as well as shelter from predators.

Tourism and the expansion of built-up areas at the expense of natural habitats undoubtedly have an ongoing impact on the persistence of lizards on the islands (Bullock 1986; Langkilde et al. 2003; Tapper 2006). Increasing urbanization, crowded beaches and human-modified coastlines induce lizards to modify their microhabitat (Zdunek 2022). However, the specifics of the impact of human disturbance on the ecology of skinks on Unguja Island are still unknown. The most serious likely threat is habitat destruction through anthropogenic use of rock outcrops for recreation, tourism and fishing, but there is also the possibility of sea level rise or tsunamis related to climatic factors (Masterson 2014). Additional observations may provide a more comprehensive view of the impact that island urbanization and tourism have on the ecology of skink populations and



**Figure 1.** A typical Coconut Palm base with numerous cracks, with an adult Coral Rag Skink (*Cryptoblepharus africanus*) foraging and then sheltering in a crack in Jambiani, Unguja Island, Tanzania. Photos: Przemyslaw Zdunek.

their habitat use. Observations such as these, even as single events, can broaden the scope of information about the natural history and ecology of Coral Rag Skinks in Africa.

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