

St. Croix Ground Lizard

Ameiva polops



Family: Teiidae
Order: Squamata

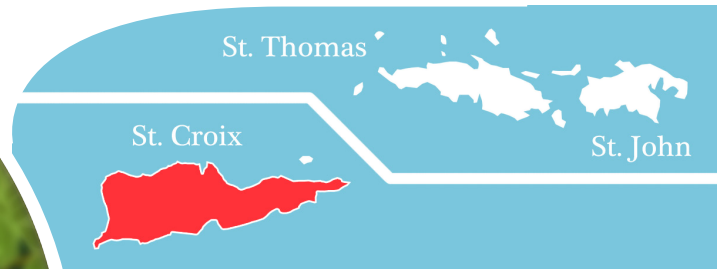
Description

The St. Croix ground lizard (*Ameiva polops*) is a small lizard that can measure between 1 to 3 inches (25 - 76 mm) in length. It features wide dorsal striping, a pink throat and white or cream ventral area. Male lizards have blue and white colored scales mottled below their tan and brown dorsal stripes. The lizard's tail is longer than its body length and the tail is ringed with alternating blue and white bands. Juveniles have bright blue tails, and the tail coloration fades with age. Male lizards are larger than females.

Biological Information

Reproducción

These lizards reproductive cycle lasts from March through November. It is believed that females lay a single egg, twice a year.



Distribution

Habitat

The species' habitat includes forested, woodland, and shrub land areas. The species is most commonly found in sandy areas and patches of direct sunlight, on the ground, or in low canopy cover and leaf litter (fallen leaves). Ground lizards spend most of their time foraging and thermoregulating. Other activities include aggressive interactions among individuals, mating, and burrowing behavior.

Diet

Individuals actively forage within leaf litter (fallen leaves) and loosely compacted soils for a variety of invertebrates such as centipedes, moths, arthropods, hermit crabs, sand fleas, and segmented worms.

Distribution

The lizard populations previously existed on the island of St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands, and other adjacent cays. The ground lizard is presumed extinct in St. Croix. The last report of the species in the main island of St. Croix was in 1968. Currently native populations occur in the offshore cays of Protestant Cay and the Green Cay National Wildlife Refuge. Two additional populations have been established through a translocation program in Ruth Cay and Buck Island Reef National Monument (BIRNM).

Threats

The St. Croix ground lizard loss of population and decreases in other areas has been attributed mostly to invasive mongoose predation and significant habitat modification. Long-term effects of potential sea level rise and shoreline erosion, with subsequent loss of

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vegetation, would decrease food and shelter sources, thus increasing the habitat modification threat for the species.

Conservation Measures

The species was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1977. Protestant Cay and Green Cay were designated critical habitats, as well. The translocation of lizards to create additional self-sustaining populations in protected areas has been implemented. In 1990 and 2008, several lizard populations were successfully transferred to Ruth Cay and Buck Island RNM, respectively. The persistence and success of these populations is possible because of interagency conservational efforts. For instance, the National Park Service undertook extensive efforts to maintain the islands free of mongooses and rats.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, prohibits the killing, harassing, trapping, purchasing or selling any species, as well as parts and products derived from the species.

References

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Additional Information

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