



Les Harrison  
Ag & Natural Resources Agent  
County Extension Director  
UF/IFAS Wakulla County Extension

Follow us...



---

## Skinks Prey on Insects

---

There are some inevitable facts associated with living in Wakulla County and, for that matter, north Florida. For natives and long-time residents these facts seem obvious.

For more recent transplants there is an epiphany when the apparent realities are recognized with a degree of startled amazement. This moment of awakening is sometimes predicated upon acknowledgment of a painful truth.

Yes, summers are hot and electric bills will be higher. It is true weeds will grow faster and higher than grass in a lawn.

Granted, there are large roaches in Florida, even though some people insist on politely calling them palmetto bugs. Luckily there is a solution close at hand for controlling these insects which are generally regarded with painful acknowledgement as disgusting and repulsive.

The Southeastern five-lined skink is a common lizard and the most common skink species in Wakulla County, but it is infrequently seen. They are, by local standards, a large lizard with the potential to reach eight inches in length.



The body background color is usually gray, brown, or black with five white or yellowish stripes running the length of this reptile, two on each side and one centered down the back.

It has short legs, a sleek body and a deceptively listless appearance. At a distance of several yards it is easily viewed, seemingly dozing without a care in the world.

Let a roach, any variety will do, or other tasty insect pass close by and the skink becomes a polychromatic blur in pursuit of its next meal. Southeastern five-lined skinks prey on a wide variety of insects, spiders,

other invertebrates and occasionally engage in cannibalism when the situation requires, but they are especially fond on roaches.

While occasionally seen in the open, these reclusive and shy lizards are most often encountered in leaf litter, beneath logs or under the bark of decaying trees. When pursued, these lizards generally sprint for the nearest tree or brush pile and can be quite difficult to capture.

These young skinks have a bright blue tail with a metallic sheen. On adult males the stripes usually fade and are replaced by reddish or orange coloration around the head, but their scales retain the reflective luster.

The bright colors are hard to disguise in the wild for both juvenile and adult Southeastern five-lined skinks. If attacked, these skinks will detach their tails when restrained, distracting the predator and allowing the lizard to escape.

These skinks are sometimes referred to as "scorpions" and are believed to have a venomous tail or a toxic sting. This is not true, but there are some scientists who speculate these skinks have an offensive taste to some predators.

During the summer female southeastern five-lined skinks lay a clutch of up to 15 eggs in moist soil or decaying wood. They demonstrate an unusually high level of parental care by attending the eggs until they hatch.

In communal nests females alternate foraging and guarding of the nests so the eggs are continually guarded. When the eggs hatch, the young are ready to eat and roaches are on the menu.

To learn more about skinks and other lizards in Wakulla County, contact the UF/IFAS Wakulla County Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

