



ENDANGERED SPECIES:

Enviro group seeks federal protections for 9 Caribbean skinks

Jessica Estepa, E&E reporter
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Ecologist Renata Platenberg joined CBD in filing the petition.

The Center for Biological Diversity yesterday petitioned to have nine species of Caribbean lizards protected under federal law.

The creatures are threatened by habitat destruction, predation from non-native predators such as mongoose and feral cats, a lack of regulation on those predators, and climate change, according to the petition.

The lizards, known as skinks, are found only in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. A study published in 2012 recognized the genetic differences between skinks and other reptiles found in the Caribbean.

The skink, as both a predator and prey in its native environment, plays an important role in maintaining ecosystem health, CBD said.

CBD has called for the following species found in Puerto Rico to be protected under the Endangered Species Act: the culebra skink (*Spondylurus culebrae*), mona skink (*S. monae*), monito skink (*S. monito*) and Puerto Rican skink (*S. nitidus*).

“Time is running out for these lizards,” Collette Adkins, a biologist and lawyer with the group, said in a statement. “The Caribbean is home to extremely rare animals found nowhere else in the world, but too many have already gone extinct.”

The other species it petitioned for are found in the Virgin Islands: the lesser Virgin Islands skink (*S. semitaeniatus*), Virgin Islands bronze skink (*S. sloanii*), greater Saint Croix skink (*S. magnacruzae*), greater Virgin Islands skink (*S. spilonotus*) and lesser Saint Croix skink (*Capitellum parvicruzae*).

The skinks, which can grow up to 8 inches long, are known for their unique reproductive systems. They have placentas and go through live birth, instead of laying eggs like other reptiles.

