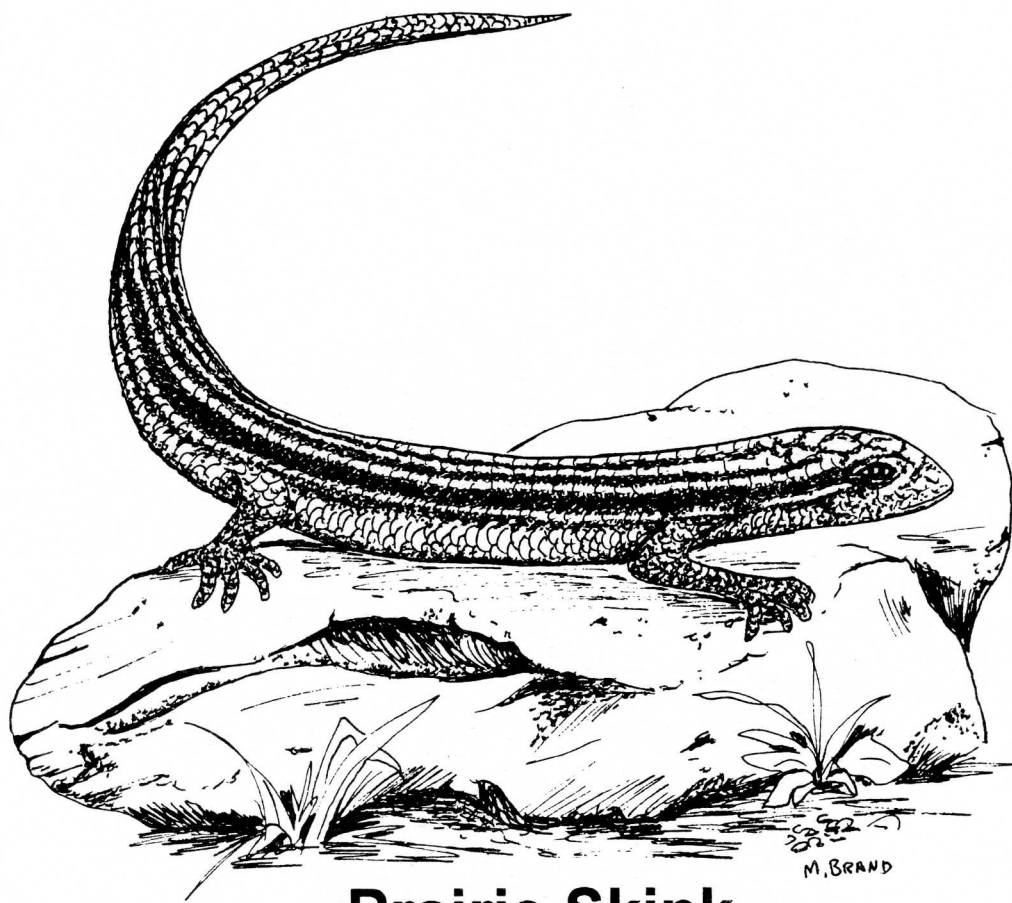


# River Bend Naturalist Notebook

at

**RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER, Faribault Minnesota**

Illustrations by MOE BRAND • Text by Cailin Orr, Intern Naturalist



## Prairie Skink

*Eumeces septentrionalis*

The prairie skink joins the six-lined racerunner and the five-lined skink in being one of only three lizards in Minnesota. The prairie skink has a cylindrical body of 5-9 inches with small legs and three dark stripes down its body. Males develop bright orange throat patches during the breeding season in early spring which fade over the summer. Hatchlings start out with a bright metallic blue tails which, similar to adults' tails, break off easily if the skink is threatened. Broken tails grow back, but not to their original length or color.

The prairie skink can be distinguished easily from the six-lined racerunner because skinks have smooth shiny scales while the racerunner is dull and rough in appearance. Five-

lined skinks are differentiated by a distinct V-shaped marking on their head and stripes which are narrower than the stripes of prairie skinks.

Good skink habitat is open, grassy areas near pine stands or oak savannas. Loose sandy soil or scattered rocks give the cold blooded skinks a place to sun themselves, as do sandy banks near rivers or creeks. The prairie skink has a range in a North/South band from Minnesota and Western Wisconsin to Eastern Texas.

On cold days, the highly secretive skinks hide in burrows they dig 1-4 ft deep to get below the frost line. This keeps the skinks warm but also protects them from their many predators which include marsh hawks, barred owls, kestrels, shrikes, ground squirrels and raccoons.