



Plestiodon erythrocephalus.

Sera. pinnat.

P.S. Duval. Lith. Phil<sup>a</sup>

PLESTIODON.—*Dumeril et Bibron.*

GENUS PLESTIODON.—CHARACTERS. Nostrils open in the middle of the nasal plate; palate with a broad mesial fissure, enlarged at its anterior extremity; sphenoidal teeth numerous, short, straight, conical; all the scales smooth.

PLESTIODON ERYTHROCEPHALUS.—*Gilliams.**Plate XVI.*

CHARACTERS. Head large, very broad behind, contracted before the eyes, and covered with plates; snout elongated and rounded; body olivaceous; head bright red; jaws and sphenoid bones armed with strong teeth.

SYNONYMS. *Scincus erythrocephalus*, *Gilliams*, Journ. Acad. Nat. Scien. Philad., vol. i. p. 461, pl. xviii.

*Scincus erythrocephalus*, *Harlan*, Journ. Acad. Nat. Scien., vol. vi. p. 11.

*Scincus Americanus*, *Harlan*, Med. and Phys. Res. p. 138.

*Plestiodon laticeps*, *Dumeril et Bibron*, Hist. Nat. des Rept., tom. v. p. 705.

Scorpion, *Vulgo*.

DESCRIPTION. The head is large, very broad behind, contracted in front of the eyes, but rounded at the snout. The vertical plate is pentagonal, narrow behind, broader, and with an acute angle before. There are five superior orbital plates, irregularly quadrilateral and nearly of the same size, except the posterior, which is triangular and smaller, and may be regarded as a posterior-orbital as it descends a little behind the orbit. The occipital plates are five in number; the two anterior small and rhomboidal; the two posterior quadrilateral and large, with a long, narrow, pentagonal plate between them; behind these are two large, rhomboidal,



elongated scales. The frontal plates are pentagonal; the anterior frontal are smaller and rhomboidal; placed in between the frontal and anterior frontal is a large hexagonal, centro-frontal plate, reaching to a plate behind the nares. The rostral plate is triangular, smaller, and rounded in front and somewhat pointed above. The nasal plate is single, and rhomboidal in shape; between this and the orbital are three loreal plates, the smallest in front, the largest behind. There are three anterior orbital plates, the middle one of which is the largest; and two posterior, the lower being the smaller. The lower margin of the orbit is completed by the sixth and seventh labial plates, of which there are eight; the posterior very large. Between the seventh and eighth labial plates, and the posterior occipital, are three large temporal plates arranged in a triangle, of which the anterior is the smallest.

The nostrils are large, latero-superior near the snout, and open upwards and outwards. The eye is small, the iris dark, the pupil darkest grey. Both eye-lids are covered with small scales. The entrance to the ear is small, elliptico-oval, and surrounded by small scales. The neck is not contracted, but appears so from the great development of the temporal region of the head.

The body is elongated, rounded, and covered with smooth imbricated scales, arranged in longitudinal rows, both above and below, with two or three large scales in front of the vent. The tail is thick at the root, nearly the size of the body, but soon becomes small, cylindrical, and greatly elongated; it is covered with imbricated scales above, like the back; but below there is a central series resembling plates, with scales on either side to about one-third of the distance, when the scales disappear, and the plates are continued, as in some of the serpent tribe.

The anterior extremities, as well as the posterior, are short, thick, and strong; the former terminating in five fingers, the latter in five toes, very delicate, and covered with scales to the root of the nails, all of which are armed with short, small, curved nails.



**COLOUR.** The head above is bright red. The body and tail above are olive-brown, a little darker on the sides. The throat and abdomen are yellowish-white.

**DIMENSIONS.** Length of head, 1 inch 2 lines; greatest breadth of head, 1 inch; length of neck and body, 3 inches 2 lines; length of tail, 7 inches: total length, 11 inches 3 lines. I have measured specimens 13 inches in length.

**HABITS.** The *Plestiodon erythrocephalus* chooses his residence in deep forests, and is commonly found about hollow trees, often at a height of thirty or forty feet from the ground; sometimes taking up his abode in the last year's nest of the woodpecker, out of which he thrusts his bright red head in a threatening manner to those who would disturb his home. He never makes his habitation on or near the ground, and in fact seldom descends from his elevation unless in search of food or water. Though shy and timid, he is very fierce when taken, and bites severely, owing to the great strength of his jaws, as well as the size and firmness of the teeth. The bite, however, though sharp and painful, is not, as is commonly supposed, venomous.

**GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.** This animal is found from latitude 39° to the Gulf of Mexico in the Atlantic states, as well as in Mississippi and Louisiana.

**GENERAL REMARKS.** This animal was certainly first described by Gilliams. Lawson, in his *History of Carolina*, speaks of a Lizard called the Scorpion, but he does not mention the red head, which is a distinctive character of this; and Pennant, in the *Supplement to his Arctic Zoology*, has only quoted Lawson.

Temminck and Schlegel,\* after the examination of several specimens furnished them by Troost, consider this animal identical with the *Scincus quinquelineatus*, differing in appearance only from age or sex—when a single glance at its compressed snout and broad head at the temporal region, its numerous and strong

\* Siebold, *Faun. Japon.* Reptilia, by Temminck and Schlegel, p. 99.

sphenoidal teeth, is enough to distinguish it from all others of our Skinks, without considering its geographical distribution.

I have adopted, without hesitation, the genus *Plestiodon*, under which Dumeril and Bibron have arranged this animal, which is distinctly separated from that of *Scincus* by the great development of the head at the temporal region, its numerous, strong, conical, sphenoidal teeth, its nostril in a single plate, &c.

I cannot receive their specific name "*laticeps*" for this reptile, because I do not suppose it, with them, to be indetical with the *Scincus laticeps* of Schneider.\* His description is too short and vague to distinguish his animal from those closely allied, and he never saw but one specimen in the Museum at Göttingen, in which the "body was of a uniform greyish-brown colour above, and the tail had two black spots near the extremity."

Another animal of the same species, he says, existed in his time in the collection of Tilesius, at Leipsic, "the body of which was shaded with black spots, and had the tail annulated with black bands," (in cauda vero anulatum apparet,) which is certainly very unlike our animal. Daudin even, who copies Schneider in his description of the *Scincus laticeps*, as there were no specimens of it in the Garden of Plants at Paris when he wrote his excellent work on reptiles, thought best to refer it to the animal represented in Seba,† and said by him to come from Africa.

\* Hist. Amphib., Fas. ii. p. 189.

† Thes. tom. ii. tab. xii. fig. 6.





Holbrook, John Edwards. 1842. "Plestiodon crythrocephalus – Gilliams." *North American herpetology; or, A description of the reptiles inhabiting the United States* 2, 117–120. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.326787>.

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