

EMOIA ADSPERSA (LACERTILIA: SCINCIDAE) - CONFIRMED IN TONGA

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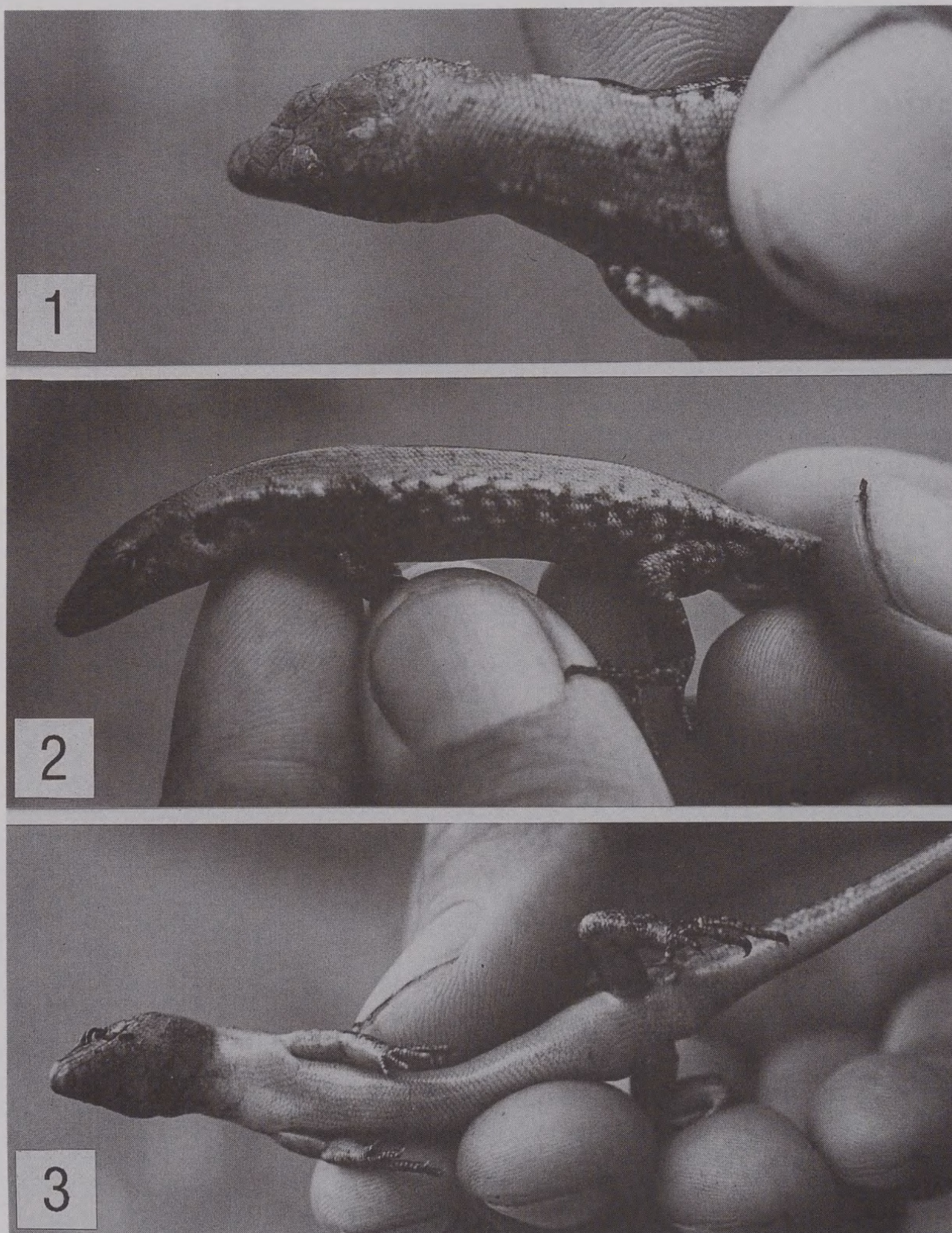
On 6 March 1994, one of us (DRR) caught an unusual skink near the road between the villages of Sapa'ata and Fata'ulua on the island of Niuafo'ou, northern Tonga. The road passes through mixed vegetation comprising coconut plantations (*Cocos nucifera*) and low secondary bush interspersed with large mango trees (*Mangifera indica*). The skink was resting in the sun on an exposed log. DRR saw similar skinks during many months of field work on Niuafo'ou, but at first took them to be juveniles of the moderately common Pacific Black Skink (*Emoia nigra*). He later suspected a different species was involved, and was able to catch a specimen. It was taken alive to the Brehm Fund Bird Park on Tongatapu, but escaped after three weeks.

Photographs (Figs 1-3; originals in colour) show that the skink had a golden brown dorsal surface and a black lateral band, all heavily patterned with light and dark blotches. The overall appearance is of a coarsely speckled lizard without longitudinal stripes. The ventral surfaces were grey with a pale yellow suffusion between the thoracic region and the vent. From the size of the human thumb-nail in Fig. 2 we estimate that the lizard had a snout-vent length of 71 mm. The pictures also show that it had a distinct interparietal head-shield and very small body scales. We can count at least 50 mid-body scale rows. These features all agree with the description of *Emoia adspersa* (Steindacher, 1870) which has 50-60 mid-body scale rows and a maximum snout-vent length of 85 mm (Brown 1991).

E. adspersa was not recorded in the Tongan herpetofauna by Gill & Rinke (1990), but was listed from northern Tonga by Zug (1991, table F) on the basis of a specimen in the National Museum of Natural History, Washington D.C. (USNM 82863). This specimen was collected from "Niaufou" (*sic*) on 1 September 1930 by H.C. Kellers during the U.S. Naval Eclipse Expedition. It is a juvenile of 33.2 mm snout-vent length and 47 mm tail length.

The sightings of *E. adspersa* reported here confirm that a population persists on Niuafo'ou. Schwaner & Brown (1984) reported *E. adspersa* from Funafuti (Tuvalu), Swains and Nukunonu Islands (Tokelau group), Pukapuka (Danger group), Savai'i and 'Upolu (Western Samoa) and Futuna (Wallis and Futuna group, unconfirmed). It is rarely encountered and there are few voucher specimens. The presence of *E. adspersa* on the northern Tongan outlier of Niuafo'ou represents a southerly extension of its known range, but it remains distributed "west and north of the American Samoan archipelago" (Schwaner & Brown 1984).

DRR saw specimens of *E. adspersa* along roads, in other open disturbed habitats and in *Pandanus* groves near the coast. He never saw them in the crater area of Niuafo'ou, where native forest dominates.



Figs 1-3. Skink from Niuafu'ou presumed to be *Emoia adspersa*. 1. Dorsal. 2. Lateral. 3. Ventral. (Photos: D.R. Rinke.)

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Gill, Brian James, Rinke, D R, and Zug, George R. 1994. "[SHORT NOTE]: EMOIA ADSPERSA (LACERTILIA: SCINCIDAE) - CONFIRMED IN TONGA." *Records of the Auckland Institute and Museum* 31, 215–217.

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