

The Scincid Lizard Genus *Sigaloseps* (Reptilia: Scincidae) from New Caledonia in the Southwest Pacific: Description of a New Species and Review of the Biology, Distribution and Morphology of *Sigaloseps deplanchei* (Bavay)

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ABSTRACT. *Sigaloseps* is a genus of two species of scincid lizards endemic to the southern ultramafic region of New Caledonia in the southwest Pacific. The morphology, distribution, and habits of the moderately widespread species *Sigaloseps deplanchei* are reviewed. The other species in the genus represents a new taxon known only from two high altitude sites above 1,000 m asl. The conservation status of both species is assessed. *Sigaloseps deplanchei* is not regarded as threatened. The new species, *Sigaloseps ruficauda*, by virtue of its restricted distribution and habitat preference, is likely to be adversely affected by habitat modification, and is regarded as vulnerable.

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The generic name *Sigaloseps* was originally proposed by Sadlier (1986) to include the small New Caledonian scincid lizard *Lygosoma deplanchei* Bavay (1869). At that time it was regarded as a monotypic genus and known only from a few specimens from a few localities in the south of New Caledonia.

Field research in the intervening decade has greatly increased both the amount of material available and our knowledge of the distribution and habits of *Sigaloseps deplanchei*. These data indicate that *S. deplanchei* is endemic to moist, closed forest in the ultramafic block in

the southern third of the island. It is relatively common in this habitat type and not considered to be under any immediate threat. Investigation of high altitude habitats in 1995 resulted in the discovery of a second species of *Sigaloseps* in southern New Caledonia. This species is so far known only from two sites in geographical proximity to one another, Mt Mou and Mt Ouin. The new *Sigaloseps* is one of only two species of skink known to be restricted to high altitude habitat in southern New Caledonia (the other being an undescribed species of *Marmorosphax*) and is likely to occur only as scattered relictual populations in