

GONGYLOMORPHUS BOJERII BOJERII (Bojer's skink): **ARBOREALITY**. The *Gongylomorphus*, or slit-eared skink genus, is an endemic of the Mascarene Islands (Vinson & Vinson, 1969) and is currently represented by two described subspecies on Mauritius and its islets. The elusive Macchabée skink (*Gongylomorphus bojerii fontenayi*) is found only on the mainland of Mauritius with sightings confined to the type locality of the Macchabée forest (Jones, 1988). The second subspecies Bojer's skink (*Gongylomorphus bojerii bojerii*) was once widespread throughout Mauritius but is now confined the northern islets of Round Island, Gunners Quoin, Flat Island, Gabriel Island and Serpent Island where it remains common (Figure 1). This species is described as being a generalized lizard with physiological adaptations for burrowing between dense vegetation and leaf litter (Jones, 1993). Previous literature regarding the ecology of *G. b. bojerii* is limited, however all sources describe Bojer's skinks as being strictly terrestrial (Jones, 1993; Vinson & Vinson, 1969 & Vinson, 1975). Hence, here I report observations made during a field study that show *G. b. bojerii* to exploit arboreal habitats.

Whilst conducting other research on Round Island, an adult Bojer's skink was observed (20th May 2004, 09:15 hrs) climbing from the base of a mature fan palm (*Latania loddigesii*) to the crown of the tree, at a height of approximately 3.5 m (Figure 2). The skink remained at the crown of the palm for a period of approximately five minutes, during which it was observed pursuing an unidentified beetle amongst the fronds in the palm's crown. It is unknown whether this pursuit resulted in a successful capture due to the restricted viewing position afforded by being at ground level. Following the skink's reappearance from amongst the palm fronds it was observed to climb back down the trunk of the palm to a position approximately 2 m from ground level. The skink moved around the trunk until it was in a position facing NW and remained still with its body flat to the trunk of the palm and its head towards the ground. This area of the trunk was in full sunlight and was of a noticeably darker colouration than the trunk surface in the region below this height.



Figure 1 (left): *Gongylomorphus bojerii bojerii* in typical basking pose on an area of bare rock, Round Island, Mauritius. **Figure 2** (below): *G. b. bojerii* near to the crown of a mature fan palm (*Latania loddigesii*), on Round Island, Mauritius. Photographs by author.



also be that the crowns of fan palms may offer protection from predation by larger terrestrial Telfair's skinks (*Leiopisma telfairii*), a species known to predate on Bojer's skinks from a young age (Pernetta *et al.*, in press). Further work examining the microhabitat use of Bojer's skinks may help to determine the importance of fan palms in the ecology of this species.

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This single observation encompassed two clear uses of arboreal habitats by Bojer's skinks, not only was the skink observed to attempt to prey upon an insect in the crown of the palm but it was also observed to utilise the thermal properties of the palm's trunk to aid its thermoregulation. It may

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