AMENDMENTS TO APPENDICES I AND II OF THE CONVENTION

Other Proposals

A. PROPOSAL

Inclusion of Corucia zebrata in Appendix II.

B. PROPONENT

The Federal Republic of Germany.

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxonomy

11. Class: Reptilia

12. Order: Squamata

13. Family: Scincidae

14. Species: Corucia zebrata Gray 1855

15: Common Names:

English:	Prehensile-tailed skink
French:	
Spanish:	
German:	Salomonen-Riesenskink, Wickelschwanzskink, Wickelskink
Local dialects:	Unu, Katu, Tokorai, Bokapuo, Kokorot

16. Code Numbers:

2. Biological Data

21. Distribution: Solomon Islands. The prehensile-tailed skink is recorded from the following islands: Bougainville and Buka (Papua New Guinea), Choiseul, New Georgia, Isabel, Guadalcanal, Nggela, Malaita, San Cristobal, Ugi, Santa Ana, and Shortlands (Solomons). The land mass of these islands totals about 25,000 km^2 (Kinghorn, 1928; Lilley, 1986; McCoy, 1980; Parker, 1983).

22. Population: It is considered to be fairly common though not often seen, because of its nocturnal habit (McCoy, 1980; Parker, 1983). However, data on even estimates on its population density from any of the inhabited islands do not exist.

These skinks are usually found alone or in pairs, sometimes in small groups from three to five animals. The males are highly territorial (Parker, 1983).

23. Habitat: C. zebrata lives in primary forests. Its preferred habitat is the lowland rainforest (below 400 m), including swamp and littoral forests

characterized by Casuarina spp. The lowland rainforest is one of the most threatened habitats in the Solomons. On Bougainville it is reported to occur on a plateau at an elevation of about 900 m (west of Kieta). Preferred trees are those with dense foliage and extensive epiphytic growth, for example strangler fig trees (Ficus spp.) (McCoy, 1980; Parker, 1983). Richter (1983) states that it sometimes occurs in cultivated areas. This is confirmed by McCoy (pers. communication), who states that on the basis of his own observations C. zebrata does occur in cultivated areas and in overgrown, derelict food gardens.

C. zebrata is an arboreal and mainly nocturnal species, resting in dense foliage or in hollows in the large forest trees from about 2 m to more that 20 m height during daytime (Kinghorn, 1928; McCoy, 1980; Parker, 1983). However, during light rain or periods of heavy overcast it could be observed foraging diurnally (McCoy, pers. communication). In the wild it seems to be exclusively herbivorous; the diet includes a variety of leaves, flowers and fruits. Preferred food items are the leaves and fruit of an epiphytic Sciandapsus vine and a wild pepper vine (Piper sp.), and the leaves of the creeper Epipremnum pinnatum (Hediger, 1936; Kinghorn, 1928; McCoy, 1980; Parker, 1983).

In captivity it sometimes feeds on arthropods, and even mice and small birds (Anonymous, 1978; Honegger, 1975).

C. zebrata is ovoviviparous, giving birth to one or two young after a gestation period of four to six months once or twice a year (Ackermann, 1975; Bowler, 1981; Honegger, 1975, 1985; Lilley, 1986). It has been bred in captivity several times. Slavens & Slavens (1990) report 18 young being born in zoological gardens in 1989 in the United States. However, at least two of them are from wild-caught animals. For the rest no further comments are given, so that it cannot be stated whether they too are from gravid-caught females, or real captive-breds.

3. Trade Data

31. National Utilization: On some islands of the Solomons C. zebrata is considered to be a delicacy by the inhabitants. The skinks, as well as the large shelless eggs of gravid females are eaten (Hediger, 1937). In recent times its use as food by the villagers seems to be less important (T. Dennis, pers. com.) but still occurs (Leary, 1990).

32. Legal International Trade: The "Joint Nature Conservation Committee", United Kingdom, supplied some data concerning C. zebrata: From November 1987 to February 1991 they have records for 52 import licences, which were issued for a total of 1390 prehensile-tailed skinks. Only 12 of these licences, for 254 animals, are known to have resulted in animals being imported. The real figure is likely to be higher.

Most of the licences concern trade from the Solomons to the United States, in lesser extent to Malaysia, Madagascar, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and some are intra-state licences (mostly USA). While the former relate to wild-caught animals, the latter concern captive-bred skinks.

However, these numbers give not even a rough estimate on the real extent of trade. Leary (1990) conducted a survey of wildlife management in the

Solomons. She gives the following data, based on export permits issued by the Solomons' Ministry of Natural Resources:

Time:	Exported Corucia zebrata:
1987	150
June to July 1988	101
August to December 1988	1501
1989	4104
1989, imported in:	Number:
USA	3699
West Germany	260
Japan	120
Belgium	25

However, the Solomons' Government does not have any data on the actual numbers exported. The data prior to 1989 are very incomplete. But even so a minimum number of 5856 animals have been exported from 1987 to 1989, and the numbers appear to be rapidly increasing (Leary, 1990). C. zebrata is one of the most commonly exported species on the Solomons. (Leary, 1990).

C. zebrata is sought after in the private pet trade and for zoo exhibitions. In the recent inventory of Reptiles and Amphibians, which summarizes information from public and private collections, C. zebrata is with 208 records one of the most often kept Sauria, and the most often kept skink (Slavens & Slavens, 1990).

Prices vary. From August 1988 to December 1989 C. zebrata has been offered for $ 150 to 275 per animal in the USA; in November 1988 the price per pair in Germany amounted DM 650.

33. Illegal Trade: The export data from the Solomons in Leary 1990 are based on the four licensed reptile and amphibian dealers in the Solomons. It is unknown whether there is any illegal trade through other dealers.

34. Potential Trade Threats: C. zebrata is a large, slow moving skink with a restricted island distribution. Its preferred habitat, the lowland rainforests, is the most threatened habitat throughout the Solomons, due to logging and rural development (Leary, 1990).

C. zebrata is traded in large numbers, and the export numbers are increasing. Since there is a complete lack of data on its population status, the trade must be seen as potentially threatening.

4. Protection Status

41. National: In Papua New Guinea C. zebrata is not specifically protected, but the country does not permit export of any live animals.

In the Solomon Islands there is no national legislation protecting C. zebrata. Exports of reptiles are allowed under licence by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Leary (1990) recommends that the number of wild caught C. zebrata should be limited to 3000 individuals per year.

42. International: C. zebrata is not protected internationally.

43. Additional Protection Needs: C. zebrata is threatened in the long term throughout its entire distribution range by habitat destruction and exploitation as food resources and for export. To give an estimate on the consequences of exploitation, field studies, especially on its recent population status and population ecology, are urgently required.

Breeding efforts with the existing captive stocks should be intensified.

5. Information on Similar Species

Corucia is a monotypic genus, belonging to the subfamily Tiliquinae. Most other Tiliquinae inhabit Australia, and are protected by the national legislation.

6. Comments from Countries of Origin

McCoy, Solomon Islands, states that he is most concerned regarding the increasing trade in Corucia. He has spoken with several people in rural areas (Malaita, Ngela, Guadalcanal) who have collected prehensile-tailed skinks for sale to exporters in Honiara. His information show that comparatively large numbers of skinks are being taken from relatively small areas. This situation, allied with the acknowledge large scale destruction of lowland forest might well result in the eventual elimination of parochial populations of the animals (McCoy, pers. communication, 1991).

He proposes to involve a Melanesian PhD candidate in the study of population dynamics of Corucia, sponsored by CITES funding.

7. Additional Remarks

8. References

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