

# Wall Lizards

by IRIS MURRAY

ALL lizards are typical Old World specimens of the true lizard family (*Lacertidae*) and there are so many species and varieties that herpetologists have never been able to agree as to the exact number. Colours of these lizards vary—blue, brown and grey, with black and darker markings, and the average size is between six and eight inches.

Wall lizards are widely distributed over Asia, Africa, and in Europe as far north as Belgium and Southern Germany. Like all members of the *Lacertidae* they are carnivorous, living on insects, snails and worms, while some of the larger specimens often turn cannibalistic and feed on their smaller relations. They appear to be fond of sweet food and sugar, and must be kept supplied with water to drink when kept in vivaria.

During the warm or hot sunny days in the Mediterranean area, they can be seen darting over walls or rocks searching for insects. Wall lizards possess digits which have smooth tubercular lamellae underneath, enabling the creature to cling to smooth vertical surfaces. In some south European countries where open air film-shows are given with white-washed walls used as screens, amazing results often occur when two or three curious lizards make their appearance together with a glamorous film-star! They love to frisk about or bask in the sun, but on dull grey days they can usually be found beneath a stone or in a crevice, in a lethargic state.

When the heat of the sun attracts them from their homes, at the first sign of danger they scuttle back to exactly the same spot. If however, they are removed from the locality of their hide-outs, they become decidedly flustered and are easily trapped. In spite of the fact that they are shy creatures, they are curious and this often leads to their downfall. They can be caught comparatively easily by attaching a noose to the end of a rod, and putting it over the lizard's neck. This method has been used in Italy for the past 2,000 years.

The hibernation period is neither long nor deep, and



Photo:

Lionel E. Day

often on occasional warm days in winter, they can be seen basking in the sun. If plenty of climbing space is provided, and they are protected from frost, these hardy lizards will adapt themselves quite well to living in a dry sandy vivarium, feeding on meal-worms, flies and grass-hoppers and becoming quite tame if treated properly.

*Lacerta muralis* is the common wall lizard most often available in pet shops. Males are more colourful than the females and show black markings as well as traces of blue and green.

## Tubifex Troubles

(Continued from the opposite page)

fleas" basis. This minute worm apparently attacks the embryo young in the female, causing them to rot away and destroy the parent fish. I don't quite see how this explains my sickly male platy, but maybe he just had a bad hangover. Under this theory the cure appears to be to wash the *Tubifex* thoroughly and frequently, for this parasite apparently dislikes clean water as much as my young son.

So now I wash my *Tubifex* in streams of running water in the bath, a habit which delights my son but horrifies my wife. Then I assiduously chop them into the smallest pieces and feed the fish. No more fatal maladies have occurred since I've been pursuing this policy and I daren't change it in case they re-occur. But I'd be glad to know if there is a chance that one day I will be able to return to the halcyon days of feeding unwashed, complete *Tubifex* to grateful fish, safe in the knowledge that all the time my troubles were caused by too much starchy dry food.

Cedric Watts

## Beautiful Gentians

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grand in late August and during most of September, and grows in any good garden soil which is retentive of moisture. Like all its friends, it asks for full sun. A species which doesn't present any difficulty at all providing there is plenty of moisture is *G. sikkimensis*. It forms a mass of shoots which may be six inches long and comes into bloom about the end of July; flowers are the typical blue with a white tip.

To end with, there is *G. sino-ornata*, which was discovered by Forrest in Yunnan in 1904. Its undoubtedly the best gentian that has ever been sent to this country. It is easy to propagate, grows well, flowers late and it throws plenty of blooms at that. The colour is royal blue and on the outside of the flowers are broad bands of purplish blue interspaced with yellowy green markings. It likes a rich soil, plenty of moisture and no lime. It flowers with me from September until well on in November unless there is a severe frost earlier.