

THE LACERTID LIZARDS (PART FOUR)

R. S. DAVIES

V222 Philharmonic Court, University of Liverpool, Liverpool

I conclude my review of the keeping of Lacertid lizards with more notes on selected species. These are chosen from my list of favourites and represent a fair degree of the diversity of the family. Species are listed together under geographical regions.

(b) Southern & Eastern Europe

Lacerta lepida (Eyed lizard):

Said to be the largest surviving lacertid, though much of its normal maximum length (males to 85 cm), lies in the tail - unlike the Gran Canarian giant, old males of which may appear to dwarf this species, they certainly do in terms of aggression at least. Not that this is a particularly friendly species - many individuals are confirmed biters, never willingly allowing themselves to be handled. Even so, if given plenty of room (preferably an outdoor enclosure), it does very well in captivity. Lays up to ten (or rarely more) eggs and has the advantage that the hatchlings are relatively large and correspondingly easier to rear. Avoid housing two or more males in anything but the largest of enclosures. Will take fruit etc.

Podarcis hispanica (Iberian wall lizard):

Smaller, flatter and more nimble than *P. muralis* but sometimes labelled as that species (particularly by certain dealers), takes its place over most of Spain where it is often found high in the mountains. This is one of those species that are easy to sex at a distance, the males being spotted or having some sort of blotched pattern the females tending more toward a simple striped arrangement. Young of this species usually have blue tails, as do those of many related species. Prefers small insects and spiders.

Lacerta monticola (Iberian mountain lizard):

A high - altitude species (as its name suggests), from Iberia. These lizards are very hardy and an escapee was often seen active when all other species were deep in hibernation (including natives such as *L. vivipara*). Recommended for outdoor enclosures. Lays one or two clutches of 2 to 5 eggs and the young have a relatively high humidity requirement if in indoor vivaria. Almost exclusively a live - food specialist.

Podarcis melisellensis (Dalmatian wall lizard):

Highly variable in size and markings but usually some shade of green. Island populations even more variable, often bluish

or even jet-black. An eastern European (Adriatic), species. Most populations I have seen tend to be more delicately built than most 'wall lizards', with smaller heads; not surprisingly they are not particularly competitive in a mixed cage and do best when kept alone. Specimens from all regions prefer invertebrate food when available but island specimens may take fruit.

Podarcis taurica (Balkan wall lizard):

A south eastern European species of which two distinct morphs are recognizable: the marked and the unmarked phase. Both turn up in dealers shops in the same batch. Usually green in colour and fairly robust in build. Despite their larger size my group was always dominated by *P. muralis* and *P. sicula* in mixed vivaria and I suggest keeping them alone. Usually lays two clutches of 3 to 6 eggs. Invertebrate prey only.

Algyroides nigropunctatus (Dalmatian keeled lizard):

Hailing from the eastern Adriatic coast region, this lizard is very attractively coloured, particularly males, their orange-red underside contrasting with their intense blue throat. Scales are highly keeled. Males show some tolerance to one another outside the breeding season but must still be watched. In my experience this species is able to coexist among others in captivity - it seems to just ignore other species while still having a highly developed social organisation of its own. Two clutches of 2 or sometimes 3 eggs is the norm. Young are relatively large and easy to care for.

Lacerta saxicola (Caucasian rock lizard):

This and related species are well known for their parthenogenic mode of reproduction i.e. females are able to lay fertile eggs without the intervention of a male. In fact males are extremely rare. Otherwise a fairly average sort of wall/rock lizard, being green/brown in base colour and rather flattened in appearance. Absence of males is a blessing in captivity, reducing problems of fighting etc. one, two or sometimes three clutches of 2 to 5 eggs. Live-food only.

(c) Island dwelling species

Podarcis pityusensis (Ibiza wall lizard):

From the Pityusen islands (Ibiza, Formentera etc.) in the Mediterranean. Thirty or more recognized subspecies, each tiny islet having its own characteristic form. Many show signs of melanism and a few are predominantly black, blue or brown. Usually stoutly built males and smaller more slender females.

P. p. krameriana is deep blue over most of its body and tail but for a green mid-back. Black markings are spread over the back and sides.

P. p. affinis is similar to the above subspecies but the blue is replaced by a beautiful shade of orange.

P. p. malaquerorum is raven black with a blue underside.

As is a typical strategy of island dwelling species, clutches of only one to three relatively large eggs are laid once or twice per year, the hatchlings being relatively large. Food

preferences tend to be an individual trait; all will take fruit and vegetable matter when livefood is scarce, most prefer livefood given the choice but certain individuals I have kept show a definite preference for plant matter. Most will also take dog food, etc.

Podarcis lilfordi (Lilford's wall lizard)

From the Balearics, this species shows many similarities to the above and is obviously closely related. The same remarks on colouration and subspeciation apply to this species which can be easily separated from *P. pityusensis* by means of a scale count (across the mid-back).

A very aggressive species not to be trusted with any others in small vivaria. One of my males was particularly aggressive and managed to negotiate a temporary cage partition and promptly ate a large female *L. vivipara* and her newly laid young and egg 'cases'. The females total length was 138mm, slightly longer than the over indulgent male *P. lilfordi* who had a regrown tail. The tip of the *L. vivipara*'s tail was projecting out of the *P. lilfordi*'s mouth and when I touched it it was shed, obviously a reflex action as the female was then disgorged and found to be dead.

Does well in outdoor enclosures which, if large enough will enable a colony to be set up with none of the aggression typical of indoor colonies: it has been suggested that such aggression is often artificially created by housing lizards in small vivaria and thus interfering with natural escape-responses etc. So indoors keep only pairs or trios.

All the following are non-hibernators

Lacerta dugesii (Madeiran wall lizard):

This shows a great deal of variation, particularly those lizards from the smaller islets, and there is again a tendency to melanism. A highly active lizard with great climbing skills, males may be particularly attractively marked with an almost metallic speckled pattern. Two or three eggs are laid twice per year - early in the season (from February), as this species is not hibernated in my collection. Omnivorous, often preferring fruit to all else.

Gallotia atlantica (Purpurarian lizard):

Though it hails from the eastern Canaries, remarkably similar in many respects to *L. dugesii*, though not a good climber. May be marked or plain. Smallest of the Canary island lacertids but like the others emits a squeaky croak when agitated. Three to five eggs are laid twice per year from late January. Omnivorous.

Gallotia galloti (Canarian lizard):

The most commonly available Canarian lizard in this country and the most visually attractive. Females of all subspecies are remarkably similar in all but size while males of the various forms are characteristic of their particular island and even region of that island in some cases. Thus *G. g. palmae* is particularly large with a sprinkling of blue on the head,

the anterior part of the body is black becoming lighter toward the tail. *G. g. caesaris* on the other hand is almost totally black with blue markings and much smaller in size. Four to six eggs twice per year is the norm, the young being among the largest of lacertid infants are relatively easy to rear. An omnivorous species taking most organic matter of appropriate size. Never attempt to house two males in the same vivarium, preferably even youngsters should be housed separately then paired up when sexable but still immature. They seem to mate for life, though this could be a manifestation of captive life.

Gallotia simonyi stehlinii (Gran Canaria giant lizard): This is the largest surviving Canary lizard, a close relative of which recently became extinct. As with *G. galloti* there is a great discrepancy in size between male and female (males may be nearly twice as large). A somewhat drab lizard older specimens in particular being a uniform dull shade of brown. However, it does have a lot of 'character' and remains a great favourite of mine, this despite of its intense shyness - a fleeting glimpse is all I see of mine for weeks at a time. As they grow older (and larger) this seems to get worse rather than better. Though I have known people to tame them the regime under which I keep them does little to rectify their shyness: They are rarely if ever handled and have access to a natural system of tunnels and hideaways. A very alert, aggressive species always ready to bite (can be very nasty), don't dream of housing it with any other species. Large males are like 'walking dustbins', taking any organic matter presented to them, feeding is therefore easy but try to give a balanced diet. Two to four eggs are laid twice per year from February. Young are the largest of all lacertids on hatching, very soon afterwards sexes become obvious. Keep in pairs - formed up when juvenile.

(d) Southern African species

Ichnotropis squamulosa (Golden racerunner)
As one might expect, very different from European lacertids showing markings totally unlike those in the familiar European pattern. Being a southern hemisphere species there may be difficulties in adjustment to northern seasons - I have not, unfortunately, had the opportunity to keep this species for many years now, but I do remember my two females each laid four or five eggs in our winter. One has the option of attempting to simulate S. African seasons (which probably means keeping them separate from your northern collection or else trying to gradually get the lizards accustomed to reversed seasons over say twelve months.

Nucras dellalandii (Tiger lizard)
A very strange looking lacertid, marked as its name suggests something like a tiger, with black transverse stripes on a white-yellow background. Long bodied. Otherwise similar to the above, (see Grzimek for photograph of similar *N. tessellata*) Like the above, it is a live food specialist and variation must be given to maintain its appetite.

only kept this species for a year or so some years back and
 ve been unable to obtain specimens since, thus I have no
 rst - hand information on its breeding habits.

TES:

is series of articles was written primarily with the newcomer
 herpetology in mind, though I have included much firsthand
 formation that will be of interest to those with little
 ecialised knowledge of the lacertids. Either way, if it
 lps prevent losses through lack of knowledge (of which I
 ve had my share in the past), and increases the number of
 eeding successes with these lizards, it will have served
 s purpose.

en I refer to lizards as hibernators and non-hibernators, I
 aware that my division is based on what I have found to be
 ccessful in captivity, this may not be what occurs in nature -
 r instance it is unlikely that the lizards of the Balearics
 dergo complete hibernation, nevertheless they are capable
 such and do better under such a regime in captivity, it
 rtainly is necessary to guarantee breeding.

nally, apologies to those in foreign parts who will have
 duced that I have written purely from the point of view of
 people sited in the British isles, I trust they will find no
 oblems making the necessary adjustments to my comments on
 mperatures and light cycles etc.

ERENCE

zimek, B. 1971: Animal life encyclopaedia Vol 6. - Reptiles.
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