



Fig. 303: Male of the Artvin Rock Lizard.

E. DUNAYEV

Fig. 304: *Darevskia derjugini silvatica*.

R. ZUEV

spots on the flanks. The belly of males is greenish with blue spots on the outer part of the ventral shields; in females, the belly is yellowish or whitish. In young lizards, the posterior half of the upper side of the tail is coloured bright turquoise-blue.

Distinguishing features: Artvin Rock Lizards differ from Common Rock Lizards, with which they are often found in close proximity, as well as other species of the genus by having fewer femoral pores and distinct white stripes along the sides of the tail.

Distribution and subspecies: The Artvin Rock Lizard is common in the Caucasus, in western and north-eastern Georgia, including Abkhazia and Ajaria, in north-western Azerbaijan and in areas bordering the Caucasus of north-eastern Turkey. In Russia, this species inhabits the south-west of the Krasnodar Region.

In all, six subspecies are recognized, of which three are common in Russia. *Darevskia derjugini silvatica* (BARTENEV & REZNIKOVA, 1931) lives in the piedmont and mountainous parts of the Krasnodar Region, mainly in the territory of the Caucasus Biosphere Reserve and the adjacent spurs of the Greater Caucasus. *Darevskia d. boehmei* (BISCHOFF, 1982) inhabits the western spurs of the Greater Caucasus. The third subspecies, *D. d. abchasica* (BISCHOFF, 1982), is found in the upper forest and subalpine zones of the upper Mzymta River. The validity of these subspecies is not unanimously accepted by experts.

Natural history: The Artvin Rock Lizard is a common forest species, inhabiting coniferous and broadleaved forests. On the northern slope of the Greater Caucasus Range, it is most numerous in beech and mixed deciduous forests. In some places of the southern slope of this range, the species reaches the upper boundary of the forest, and even penetrates into subalpine meadows for 100–150 m. In the Lesser Caucasus, this lizard mainly lives in coniferous forests, where its populations are much larger than in the north of its range. Usually, it settles on the edges of forest glades, along the edges of forest roads and clearings, as well as in river valleys. In some places, it penetrates the subalpine zone to an elevation of 1,800–1,900 m a. s. l. This species is often found on the outskirts of mountain villages in thickets of elderberry, on wicker hedges, in fallen trees, heaps of brushwood, or among scattered stones and boulders.

The Artvin Rock Lizard does not dig burrows. In bad weather and in case of danger, it hides under the roots of trees and bushes, in rotten stumps, heaps of brushwood, rodent holes, and under the loose bark of fallen tree trunks.

Fig. 305: *Darevskia derjugini silvatica* feeding on a fly.

E. SKVORTSOVA

These lizards emerge from their hibernacula between mid-February and early April. Males and juveniles appear first, females follow them two weeks later or more. Some time after the appearance of females, the breeding season begins, accompanied by increased activity in males. Mating usually occurs in May. Females lay clutches of 4–8 eggs between late June and late July. The young measuring 2–2.5 cm in body length hatch at the end of July or in August.

Adults leave for overwintering at the end of August, juveniles apparently a little later, in September. In the North Caucasus, females reach sexual maturity at a body length of about 5 cm, and in Georgia at about 4.2 cm. The longevity is 5–6 years in this species. The diet consists of small beetles, frog-flies, ants, dipterans, acrids, as well as spiders, centipedes, molluscs, and earthworms.

Conservation status: The Artvin Rock lizard is an endemic relict species listed in the Red Data Books of the Adygea and Krasnodar Territory.

Eastern Meadow Lizard

Darevskia praticola (EVERSMANN, 1834)

Figs. 306–310, Map 61

This species was described by Eduard Friedrich EVERSMANN, a German botanist and zoologist teaching at the university of Kazan, in his report on the lizards of the Russian Empire. The type of habitat this species is found in is reflected in both its scientific as well as common name (*praticola* = dwelling in meadows).



Fig. 306: A female of the nominative subspecies of the Eastern Meadow Lizard, *Darevskia p. praticola* from Dagestan. A. ALEKSANDROV



Fig. 307: Head sculation of an Eastern Meadow Lizard.

A. ALEKSANDROV

External appearance: A small and slender lizard of approximately the same body size as the previously discussed species of *Darevskia* but with a relatively long tail. Its body may reach up to 6.4 cm, its tail up to 11.2 cm in length. Females grow larger than males but have a proportionately smaller head, as well as a shorter tail and hindlimbs. The head is not flattened.

The dorsal scales are relatively large, elongated, and keeled. The number of granules between the supraocular and supraciliary shields, and the number of paired infralabial shields (5–6, of which 2–3 pairs are in contact along the midline of the throat) are diagnostic for distinguishing subspecies in *D. praticola*. The row of femoral pores extends to the knee joint.

A brownish-fulvous stripe runs along the vertebral line, usually edged with darker dashed lines. On each side, a wide longitudinal stripe of the same colour extends along the flanks all the way from the posterior edge of the eye to the tail; the lower margin of this band is usually bordered by a pale, sometimes discontinuous, line. However, some lizards are rather uniform and lack any obvious pattern, whereas others may be completely black. The belly is bright, yellow-green in males and pale yellow or whitish in females. Juveniles are dark with highly indistinct pattern.

Distinguishing features: This species differs from the Artvin Rock lizard by having a thinner, slimmer body, a different colour pat-



Fig. 308: A female of *Darevskia p. praticola* photographed in the Stavropol Territory.

I. DORONIN

tern, and more femoral pores. It differs from the Common Rock Lizard, the Caucasian Lizard and the Dagestan Lizard by having larger scales with clear longitudinal keels along the vertebral line. The Eastern Meadow Lizard is never found on rocky terrain, the preferred habitat of the three other species.

Distribution and subspecies: The distribution range of the Eastern Meadow Lizard is divided into two parts. On the one hand, this species lives in the north-west of the Balkan Peninsula, while on the other, it occurs in the Caucasus, on both sides of the Greater Caucasus Mountain Range, and in north-western Iran. In Russia, the Meadow Lizard is abundant in the Krasnodar Region, including the Black Sea coast, and from the Stavropol Territory to Dagestan.

Five subspecies are recognized, of which two are present in the Caucasus: the nominotypical subspecies, *D. p. praticola* (EVERSMANN, 1834), occupying most of the eastern part of the range, and *D. p. pontica* (LANTZ & CYRÉN, 1919), found in the north-western Caucasus and on the Black Sea coast. Some authors consider the Pontic subspecies a distinct species. However, the taxonomic status of some populations is unclear and requires further study.

Natural history: In the Caucasus, this species lives in mostly deciduous piedmont, floodplain and mountain forests, where it favours well-lit clearings offering ample shelter and hiding places, typical for forest lizards. In the Western Caucasus, the Meadow Lizards inhabit steppe, forest-steppe and foothill zones. Locally, they penetrate meadows and open steppes bordering forests. In alpine meadows, they occur to an altitude of 2,000 m a.s.l.

Meadow Lizards run and climb well on branches and the trunks of shrubs and trees. They do not dig their own burrows but hide in leaf litter, among roots, under stones, or use the tunnels of other animals. They often take refuge in prickly bushes growing in open, sunny glades, but after a while, they creep out on branches, look around, tilting their head, and, if one gently pulls a thin brindille with a fishing line tied at the end, the lizards will chase and grab the lure.

Meadow Lizards feed on various insects, among which small beetles, ants, orthopterans, caterpillars, earwigs, aphids predominate; spiders, earthworms and woodlice are also included in their diet. Sometimes, they also take softer types of food, and at places where they occur alongside Sand Lizards, this diet helps to avoid competition.

In the North Caucasus, these lizards emerge from hibernation in early April, as soon as air temperatures reach 10–14 °C. Males and juveniles are the first to become active; females appear in the beginning of May. In Transcaucasia, at an elevation of 1,500 m, lizards cease overwintering later. The onset of overwintering varies according to geographic location.

Mating occurs at the end of May, and females deposit their clutch of 2–6 eggs at the end of June or in July. The number of eggs in a clutch is determined by the size of the female, as in other species of lizards. Incubating them takes about 55 days. The young measuring 2.2–2.3 cm in body length hatch in the second half of August. Females reach their sexual maturity at a body length of 4.6–4.8 cm. In the wild, these lizards do not seem to live longer than four years.

Conservation status: Eastern Meadow Lizard populations are safe and in no need of any conservation action.



Figs. 309–310: Eastern Meadow Lizards, male above, female below. B. TRAPP



Map 61: *Darevskia praticola*.

Spiny-tailed Rock Lizard or Georgian Rock Lizard
Darevskia rudis (BEDRIAGA, 1886)

Figs. 311–313, Map 62

The Georgian Rock Lizard was described by Russian herpetologist Jacob Vladimirovitch BEDRIAGA, who studied numerous collections of lizards of the Russian Empire and Central Asia.

External appearance: A relatively large rock lizard with a noticeably flattened head, and long legs and tail. The maximum body length is 8.4 cm, whilst the tail is at least twice as long.