

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.



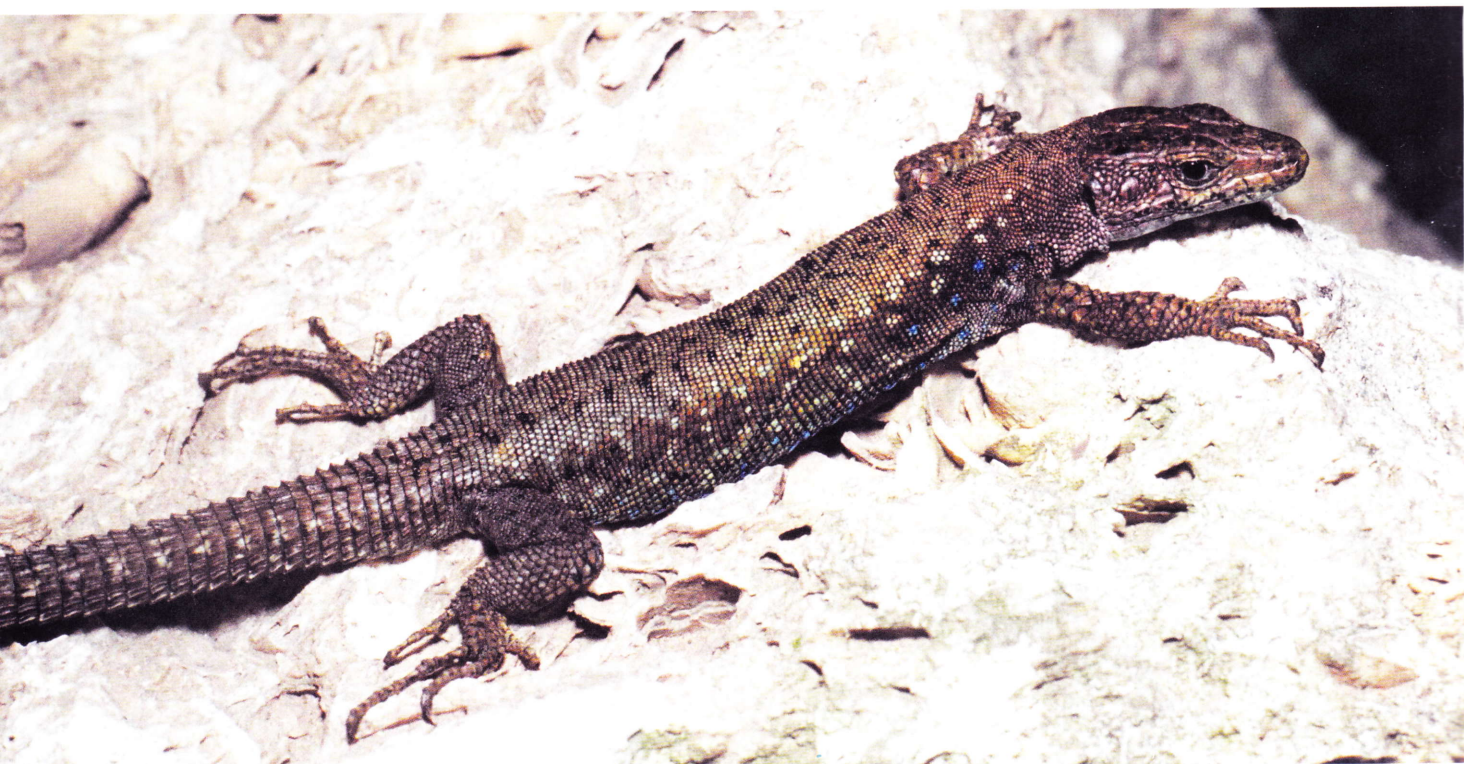


Fig. 311: Male Georgian Rock Lizard, *Darevskia rudis*. This individual is from Chechnya.

K. LOTIEV

A large or medium-sized masseteric shield is separated from the supratemporal shield by 2–4 rows and the tympanic shield by 1–5 rows of small scales. In adult lizards, there may be short, blunt spikes on small shields of the temporal region. Scales of the body are convex, larger on the sides, sometimes with weakly expressed longitudinal keels. There are 38–58 scale rows around the middle of the body.

Upper surfaces of males are coloured in shades of green or brown; the back of females is dark sandy yellow, olive, or mouse-grey. In the middle of the back, there is a stripe of large, black or dark brown spots, with unicoloured dorsolateral stripes. There are three rows of black or dark brown circles with whitish ocelli on the sides of the body; at the level of the front limbs, the ocelli are blue. The underside of the body is greenish-blue or egg-yellow in males and yellowish or bluish-green in females. During the breeding season, the ventral scales and the adjacent areas are blue or purple in males.

**Distribution and subspecies:** This species is distributed in the northern half of Turkey and in the territory of the former USSR where it inhabits the northern slopes of the Greater Caucasus Mountain Range (Chechnya, Ingushetia and the neighbouring regions of Dagestan), and in western Transcaucasia to north-western Azerbaijan in the east.

Eight subspecies have been described, of which five are common throughout the Caucasus. In Russia, one subspecies is present, *D. r. chechenica* (EISELT & DAREVSKY, 1991), found on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus from Lower Svaneti in the west to north-west Azerbaijan in the east, as well as on the northern slopes in Chechnya and neighbouring areas of Dagestan.

**Distinguishing features:** The Georgian Rock Lizard is easily distinguishable from other species of Caucasian rock lizards in that the convex scales on the upper side of the tibia are much larger than the dorsal ones and are equipped with sharp keels.



Fig. 312: A Georgian Rock Lizard from Chechnya.

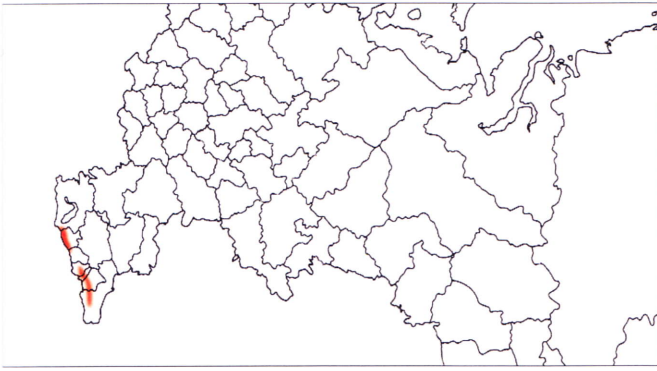
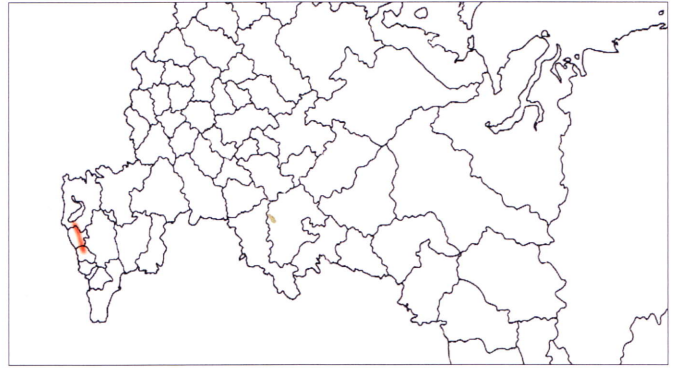
K. LOTIEV



Fig. 313: Georgian Rock Lizard from Dagestan.

L. MAZANAËVA



Map 62: *Darevskia rudis*.Map 63: *Darevskia saxicola*.

**Natural history:** The Georgian Rock Lizard remains close to the rocks and rocky outcrops of terrains along the banks of rivers and on steep-sided slopes, mainly in the forest zone. In mountains, it lives at an elevation of up to 2,000 m a.s.l. This species uses cracks and gaps between stones as shelter. In general, the habits of the Georgian Rock Lizard are similar to those of the Common Rock Lizard. It maintains more or less permanent, small individual territories and protects them from conspecific intruders. The active season begins in February or March and ends in October or November. During the mating season, clashes regularly occur between males, resembling the "fights" of green lizards. When noticing each other from a certain distance, the males stop, firmly tighten their body from the sides and on extended forelimbs, somewhat sideways to each other, begin to draw closer, sometimes stopping and scraping the ground with their front legs. The weaker opponent usually cannot withstand the pressure and flies. Females produce 4–8 relatively large eggs (up to 16 mm long) in June–July. The young hatch in August or early September at a total length of 50–55 mm. The diet includes various insects, as well as spiders, molluscs and earthworms. Occasionally, this species also preys upon small lizards, including its own offspring.

**Conservation status:** The Georgian Rock Lizard is relatively common, forming stable and dense populations within its range. Nevertheless, the species is included in the Red Data Book of North Ossetia (Alania).

#### Common Rock Lizard

*Darevskia saxicola* (EVERSMANN, 1834)

Figs. 286, 314–317, Map 63

In 1834, Eduard Friedrich EVERSMANN published his only work in herpetology, *Lacerta Imperii Rossici variis in itineribus meis observatae*, in which he described several new species, including the Common Rock Lizard. Until recently, this species was divided into four subspecies, which are now considered full species.

**External appearance:** This species is a typical representative of the rock lizard group, moving with ease over rocky terrain. The head is flattened, the tail and legs are long, and the fingers have sharp, curved claws. The maximum body length is 7 cm, the tail is up to 13.2 cm. Males reach larger dimensions than females.

The rostral shield usually does not touch the frontonasal. The masseteric shield is either absent or of small to medium size. It is

separated from the first supratemporal shield by 2–4 small scales, and from the small tympanic shield by 2–5 small scales. The dorsal scales are small, round, smooth, and slightly convex, arranged in 41–74 rows around midbody. The row of femoral pores is long and reaches to the knee joint.

Colour and pattern are variable. In males, the upper side of the body can be grass green or other shades of green; females lack green shades in their colouration, and their back is more or less dark sandy-yellow in colour.

In the middle of the dorsum, there is a stripe made of a single or a double row of dark spots and flecks; on the flanks there are stripes of the same colour decorated with pale ocelli; these ocelli turn blue at chest level. The back pattern may be obscure and barely distinguishable in some specimens.



Figs. 314–315: Variation in ventral colouration in the Common Rock Lizard.

E. DUNAYEV