



Fig. 138: *Lacerta media*, Golan Heights.

Aviad BAR

*Lacerta media* LANTZ & CYRÉN, 1920  
Balkan emerald lizard

**Hebrew name:** *Let'a Yeruka* ("green lizard")

**Recent taxonomic changes:** Currently considered a subspecies of *Lacerta trilineata*, though it does not have the characteristic stripes of the latter. Genetic analysis has shown that the subspecies *israelica* inhabiting Israel is highly distinct from other subspecies of *L. media* and thus, given the current trend within taxonomy, it may one day be recognized as a separate species.

**Size:** Up to 481 mm total length, SVL 35–136 mm; weight 1–74 g.

**Description:** The body is dark green, decorated with many black spots. The underside of the head and neck is blue or yellow, and the underbelly is yellow. The tail is longer than the head and body and is detachable. The ear openings are large and prominent. The young have a dark head and tail, and their body is adorned with three blackish longitudinal stripes on a green background.

**Similar species:** None.



Fig. 139: *Lacerta media*, juvenile, Mount Hermon.

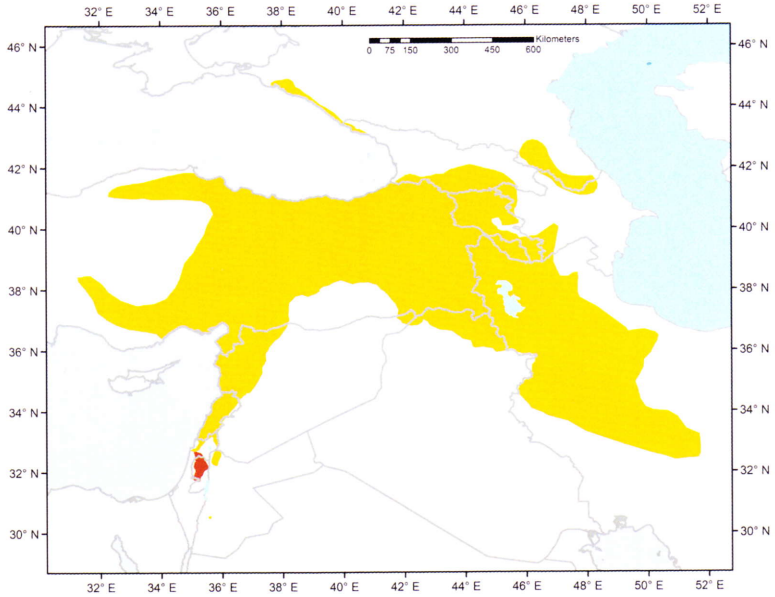
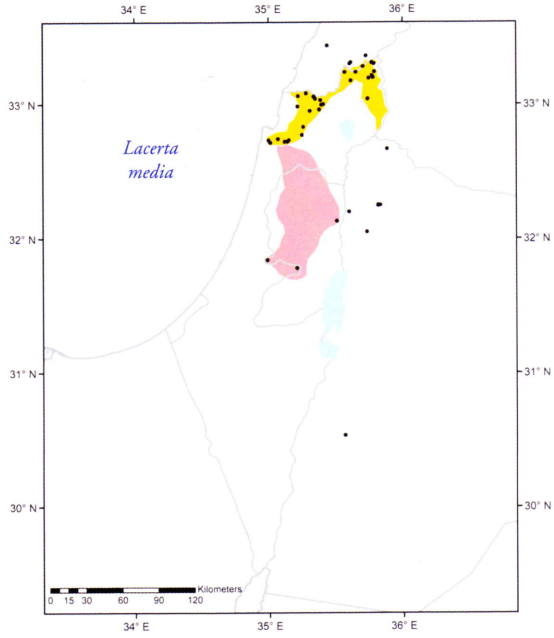




Fig. 140: *Lacerta media*, juvenile climbing a tree, Mount Hermon.

Guy HAIMOVITCH

**Natural history and behavior:** A colorful and agile diurnal lizard that climbs trees, dry stone walls, and shrubs in vegetation-rich habitats. Mostly found in open areas on the edges of thickets and orchards. Its diet consists predominantly of arthropods, supplemented with some small vertebrates. Around May and June, the female digs a nest in the ground and lays 2–15 eggs (average ~10), which hatch approximately three months after oviposition. In Armenian populations two clutches are produced each year. Whether this is also true in Israel is unknown.

**Distribution in Israel:** Mt. Carmel, Upper Galilee, the northern Golan and Mt. Hermon, potentially more fragmented than the map implies. In Samaria and the Judean Hills (marked in pink) it is presumably extinct as there are no observations from recent decades. Domestic cats are often implicated in its decline.

**World distribution:** Eastern Iran, northern Iraq, the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) and eastern Black Sea shores in Russia, Turkey, northern and western Syria to Lebanon, western Jordan, and Israel.

**Conservation:** IUCN Status: In Israel: EN (A2C, B); Global: Least Concern (decreasing populations). Globally the IUCN only presents it as declining in Jordan and on the northern Black Sea coastline. In Israel, it was once more widespread and abundant—for instance, there exist museum specimens collected in Samaria and near Jerusalem in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The species is threatened by habitat loss and land-use change, mainly urbanization, and by the spread and intensification of agriculture. Predation by house cats is thought to be a major factor in its decline, while cattle egrets may represent another potentially detrimental factor.