

Status and conservation needs: Rare and localized. Its coastal habitat is being lost and degraded by rapidly expanding tourism developments along the Red Sea shores. Classified as Least Concern by IUCN (2005).

***Mesalina olivieri* (Audouin 1829) Olivier's Lizard (Fig. 58)**

Lacerta olivieri Audouin 1829: 175. Type locality: Egypt. Holotype: MNHN not found.

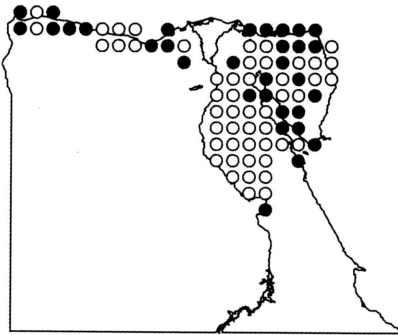
Eremias guttulata Boulenger 1887 (part)

Eremias guttulata olivieri Boulenger 1918

Eremias olivieri Haas 1951

Mesalina olivieri Szczerbak 1975

Arabic: *sihliya mukhatata*



Olivier's Lizard
(*Mesalina olivieri*)

Taxonomy: *Mesalina olivieri* was treated as a subspecies of *M. guttulata* (Boulenger 1918, 1920). Haas (1951) elevated *M. olivieri* to specific level, described the subspecies *M. o. schmidti* and indicated its occurrence in Sinai. However, Marx (1968) did not recognize this taxon at all, treating all the Egyptian *Mesalina* in the FMNH he reported on (other than *M.*

rubropunctata) as *M. guttulata*. In fact most of these are referable to *M. olivieri*. Saleh (1997) reported the occurrence of *M. olivieri* in Sinai only, but not from the Mediterranean coastal desert west of the Delta, where the nominate subspecies is abundant; undoubtedly many of the records he depicts for *M. guttulata* from the latter region actually refer to *M. olivieri*. Five subspecies have been described, most of which are now recognized at specific level (e.g., Arnold 1986a, 1989). Two subspecies can currently be recognized in Egypt: the nominate subspecies in regions west of the Nile and *M. o. schmidti* to the east of the Nile. Both are widely represented in Egypt.

Subspecies in Egypt:

Mesalina olivieri olivieri (Audouin 1829)

Eremias guttulata Anderson 1898 (part)

Eremias guichenoti Doumergue 1901

Mesalina guttulata guttulata Marx 1968 (part), Saleh 1997 (part)

Diagnosis: A small lizard, with a maximum SVL of 48 mm. Snout relatively short, usually with 4 supralabials anterior to the subocular. Lower eyelid with a window made of 4 or 5 semi-transparent scales of subequal size, not edged with black pigment. Temporals small, smooth; tympanic shield obvious. Dorsal scales medium-sized, granular, or subimbricate. Average number of dorsals at mid-body 45 (range 42–50) and ventrals 10, respectively; average number of femoral pores 12 (9–13) (based on 38 Egyptian specimens). Ventral side of lower arm covered with large imbricate scales. Dorsal side of tibia covered with smooth scales. Subcaudals slightly keeled posteriorly. Dorsal surfaces light gray-brown, usually with a clear pattern of longitudinal dark and light stripes, including rows of small ocelli, which might break down into a more spotted pattern in some adult specimens. Tail yellowish in young animals. Venter white. Hemipenis large.

Variation: Dorsal pattern rather variable. Striation strongest in juveniles, while some adult animals appear almost uniformly spotted with scattered ocelli.

Habitat and ecology: Inhabits vegetated gravel plains with scattered rocks and stones. Sometimes also found in hilly country. Found in extensive sympatry with *M. guttulata*.

Range: Morocco to Egypt west of the Nile.

Distribution in Egypt: The Mediterranean coastal desert west of the Delta to the border with Libya, generally within about 50 km from the coast, but extending as far inland as Wadi El Natrun.

Status and conservation needs: Locally common, but its coastal habitat is rapidly being lost and degraded. Classified as Least Concern by IUCN (2005).

Mesalina olivieri schmidti Haas 1951

Mesalina olivieri schmidti Haas 1951: 276. Type locality: Wadi Nefkh, Israel. Holotype: HJ 1765.

Mesalina guttulata guttulata Marx 1968 (part)

Mesalina olivieri Saleh 1997

Diagnosis: Similar to the nominate subspecies. Maximum SVL of 45 mm. Snout relatively long, usually with 5 supralabials anterior to the subocular. Lower eyelid with a window made of 4 or 5 semi-transparent scales of subequal size, not edged with black pigment. Temporals small, smooth; tympanic shield obvious. Dorsal scales medium-sized, granular or subimbricate. Average number of dorsals at mid-body 44 (range 40–50) and ventrals 10, respectively; average number of femoral pores 12 (10–14) (based on 30 Egyptian specimens). Ventral side of lower arm covered with large imbricate scales. Dorsal side of tibia covered with weakly keeled scales. Subcaudals keeled. Dorsal surfaces sandy gray, with a strong longitudinal pattern of dark and light stripes, including rows of small ocelli. Striated pattern more obvious than in the nominate subspecies. Tail yellowish in young animals. Venter white. Hemipenis large.

Habitat and ecology: Inhabits vegetated sandy desert and gravel plains. Found on softer substrates and in more open situations than the nominate subspecies. A taxon with a wide ecological amplitude. In Sinai it is found in sand dunes in the north, on gravel plains in the center and around coastal salt marshes in the south. In the dunes of North Sinai animals have, on several occasions, been found at night sleeping on the terminal parts of vegetation high off the ground. It is likely that animals use these perches to avoid nocturnal predators in this structurally simple environment. Sympatric occurrence with *M. guttulata* limited.

Range: Egypt to northern Saudi Arabia and southern Iraq.

Distribution in Egypt: Sinai and the Eastern Desert south to at least the latitude of Luxor. Occurrence in the Eastern Desert not hitherto documented. Records from this region include animals observed in the Cairo-Ismailia Desert, specimens collected at Wadi Quseib (FMNH 154626), near Zaafarana (SMB 191), Hurghada (NMNH 132749-52), between Hurghada and Safaga (SMB 10956), and Luxor (FMNH 78801, CAS 12754).

Status and conservation needs: Widespread and locally common. Classified as Least Concern by IUCN (2005).