

***Mesalina pasteuri* (Bons 1960) Saharan Lizard (Fig. 59)**

*Eremias pasteuri* Bons 1960: 69. Type locality: Amguid, Hoggar, Algeria. Holotype: MNHN 32.141.

*Mesalina pasteuri* Szczerbak 1975

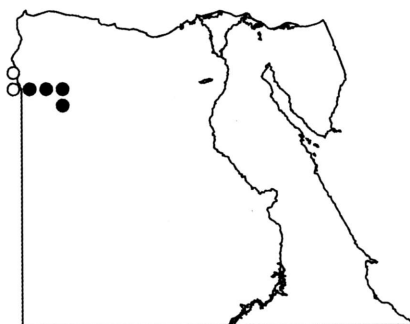
*Eremias guttulata guttulata* Marx 1968 (part)

*Mesalina pasteuri* Baha El Din 1995

**Arabic:** *sihliya mukhatata sihrawiya*

**Taxonomy:** Monotypic. The presence of this species in Egypt was first indicated by Baha El Din (1995), who reported a single specimen in Siwa Oasis. Two specimens were collected earlier also from Siwa (FMNH 66078, BMNH 1938.8.4.38), but both were referred to *M. guttulata* (Marx 1968, BMNH catalogues). Subsequently 6 further specimens were collected, and many more observed in the general vicinity of Siwa. Farid's (1979) "desert form" of *M. guttulata* from Siwa is probably referable to this species.

**Diagnosis:** Largest Egyptian specimen has a SVL of 46 mm (SMB 10788). A slender lizard with a rather long tail (average tail/SVL ratio = 2.5). Snout rather long; 5 supralabials anterior to the subocular. Temporals rather large and slightly carinated; tympanic shield absent or indiscernible. Dorsal scales medium-sized, granular or subimbricate, slightly carinated. Average number of dorsals at mid-body 36 (range 32–38) and ventrals 10, respectively; average number of femoral pores 12 (11–14) (based on 8 Egyptian specimens). Dorsal side of tibia covered with clearly keeled scales. Subcaudals strongly keeled. Dorsal surfaces light sandy gray, striated with 4 low contrast dark and light strips, the central two usually including darker spots. Tail straw-colored, plain. Venter white. Hemipenis large, with two lobes. Juveniles tend to be darker than adults with stronger striation. Tail yellowish in juveniles.



Saharan Lizard  
(*Mesalina pasteuri*)

**Variation:** Little variation noted in available Egyptian material and in animals observed in the field. Egyptian animals differ from more western examples examined (from Algeria and Mali) in having coarse dorsals, which are slightly carinated.

**Habitat and ecology:** Inhabits soft-sand biotopes with fairly good vegetation cover. In Egypt it has only been recorded from the neighborhood of oases. Closely attached to complex microhabitats created by dense desert vegetation, with particular preference for the spinose bushes of *Alhagi graecorum* and the grass *Stipagrostis* sp. In some aspects of its ecology it resembles populations of *M. olivieri* inhabiting the dunes of North Sinai; rather reclusive, spending much of its time within dense vegetation. Diurnal. On an extremely hot day (+50°C) animals started their activity after sunset and remained active to almost darkness.

**Range:** Northern Africa, from the Western Sahara of Morocco to Egypt, south to Mali and Niger. Not recorded yet from Libya but the record of animals only some 5 km from the Libyan borders indicate its certain presence in that country.

**Distribution in Egypt:** Known from the general Siwa region, from Shayata near the borders with Libya, to as far east as Tabaghbagh, in the western end of the Qattara Depression. Tracks probably belonging to this species were observed in *Alhagi graecorum* scrubland at Bahariya Oasis and near Bir Karawin in Farafra Oasis, but no animals were observed. Future searches might reveal its presence in these and other suitable habitats in the Western Desert.

**Status and conservation needs:** Uncommon to common, but very localized. Its habitats are rapidly eroded by the expanding land reclamation schemes in Siwa Oasis and other oases, which are targeting marginal lands on the outskirts of these oases. These are the richest habitats for herpetofauna and other animal and plant life in the entire Western Desert. Classified as Data Deficient by IUCN (2005).