

*Mesalina olivieri* (AUDOUIN, 1829)

LC

**Common names:** Olivier's Small Lizard, Olivier's Desert Racer (E), Erémias d'Olivier (F), Mesalina común (S).

**Range:** North Africa from the Atlantic Sahara to Egypt, Sinai, Israel, Jordan, southern Iraq, and northern Saudi Arabia.

**Distribution in Morocco:** Arid steppes east of the Rif and the Middle Atlas and south of the High Atlas. Occurs also in the Atlantic Sahara, not far from the coast but reaching the locality Amserdat in the south, 67 km from the ocean. Replaced west and north of the Atlas Mountains by *M. simoni*.

**Altitude:** 0–2,100 m.

**Identification:** Small ground-dwelling lizard, adults less than 50 mm SVL. Short head with a long snout, nostrils protruding, although less so than in *Mesalina guttulata* and *M. rubropunctata*. Palpebral disk composed of 3–6 translucent (usually not transparent) scales. Dorsal ground colour from brown to light grey with four light longitudinal lines, poorly to strongly contrasted, and, usually, a series of light ocelli encircled with black on each flank and two along the dorsum. In old individuals, light stripes may completely disappear. Gular and ventral regions sometimes weakly pigmented with dark grey. In comparison, *M. guttulata*



Fig. 497: *Mesalina olivieri*, male. Between Debdou and Ain Bni Mathar.

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has a more flattened head, more prominent nostrils, palpebral disk consisting of two large transparent scales usually bordered in black and lacking light longitudinal stripes.

**Habitat:** Open ground or sandy habitats with or without stones and shrubs in arid, semi-arid and Saharan regions, including cultivated areas. In rocky habitats frequently replaced by *M. guttulata*.

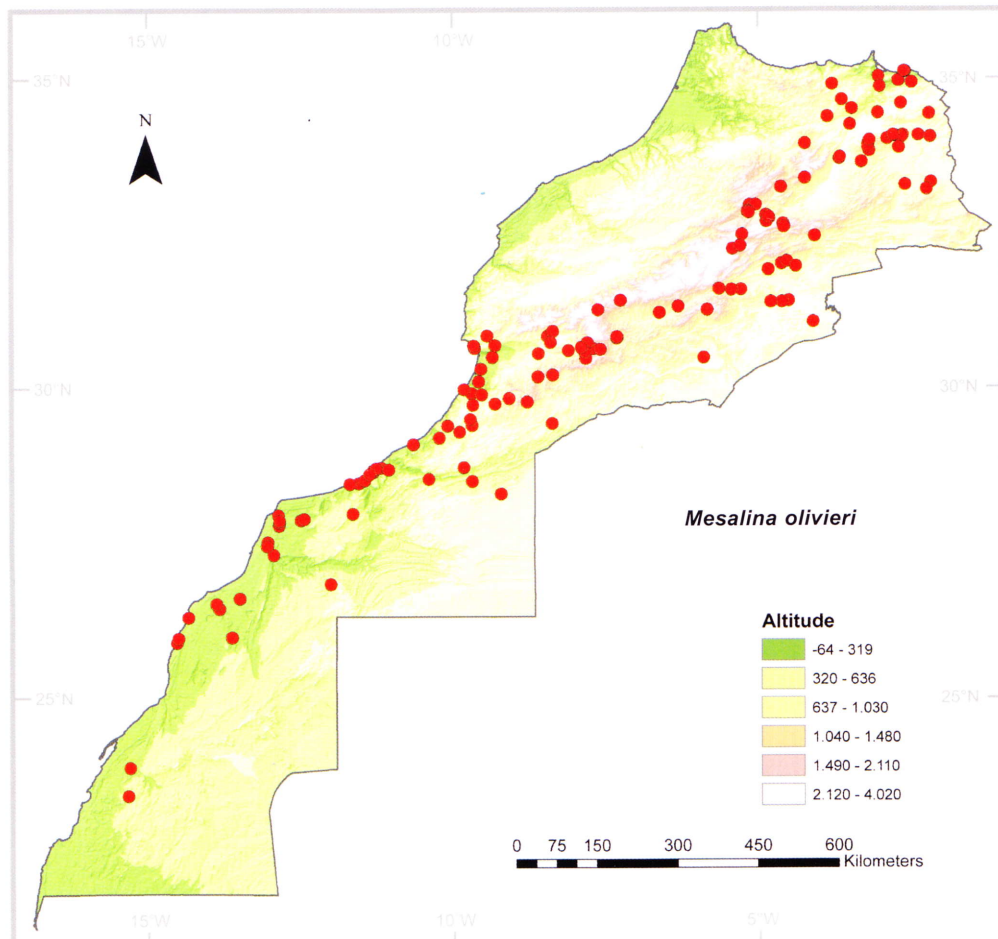




Fig. 498: *Mesalina olivieri*, female. Between Debdou and Ain Bni Mathar.

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**Biology:** Active throughout the year. In coastal populations mating occurs in spring and females produce two clutches of 2–4 eggs that hatch in July. An opportunistic predator, *Mesalina olivieri* preys upon small arthropods.

**Remarks:** According to genetic data, the *Mesalina olivieri* complex that includes *M. olivieri*, *M. pasteuri* and *M. simoni* is one of the most complicated assemblages of Western Palearctic lacertid lizards (KAPLI *et al.* 2015).



Fig. 499: *Mesalina olivieri*, juveniles. Between Debdou and Ain Bni Mathar.

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Figs. 500–501: Male *Mesalina olivieri* photographed at 6 km past Bou-Jerif towards Guelmim.