



*Mesalina pasteuri* (BONS, 1960)



**Common names:** Pasteur's Small Lizard, Pasteur's Desert Racer (E), Erémias de Pasteur (F), Mesalina del desierto (S).

**Range:** There are isolated records of this species from the Saharan regions of Senegal (TRAPE *et al.* 2012b), Mauritania, southern Morocco including the Atlantic Sahara, southern Algeria, Niger, Mali, and northwestern Egypt.

**Distribution in Morocco:** Known only from a few isolated local-

ities: Zaouia Sidi Salah (southeast of Tagounite, the *terra typica*), Mfis (southeast of Merzouga), and the southeastern Atlantic Sahara (Oued Aïn Ascāt [100 km east–northeast of Zoug], Auhafrit, and halfway between Dakhla and Ausserd). The species has been reported from close to the Moroccan border near Tindouf in Algeria.

**Altitude:** 200–750 m.

**Identification:** A small lizard up to 50 mm SVL. Relatively similar to *Mesalina olivieri* from which it can be distinguished by its beige and white longitudinal stripes and the reduced, sometimes lacking, ocelli. Also its snout is more pointed and the nostrils are more prominent. There are usually five supralabials anterior to



Fig. 502: *Mesalina pasteuri*, portrait. Halfway between Dakhla and Ausserd.

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Fig. 503: *Mesalina pasteuri*, female. Halfway between Dahkla and Ausserd.

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Fig. 504: Male *Mesalina pasteuri* from Chinguetti (Mauritania).

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Fig. 505: *Mesalina pasteuri*, juvenile. Chinguetti (Mauritania).

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the subocular scales (in *M. olivieri* the usual number is four, with the fifth touching the eye).

**Habitat:** Ergs and dunes in the more arid parts of the Sahara as well as areas with compact sandy soils, and sometimes rocky wadi beds in mountainous environments (TRAPE *et al.* 2012b). This is the most sand-adapted *Mesalina*.

**Biology:** Probably active throughout the year, including winter during mild weather. Daily activity requires the soil to be sufficiently warm but is interrupted midday during the hottest months. *Mesalina pasteuri* feed on small arthropods, including flying insects, insect larvæ, ants, termites, mites and aphids. Females lay three eggs in two clutches each year (TRAPE *et al.* 2012b).

**Remarks:** According to genetic data, *Mesalina pasteuri* belongs to the *M. olivieri* complex. Surprisingly, it is polyphyletic with at least two species strongly divergent, both sometimes occurring in the same areas (for example in Mauritania, 120 km southeast of the Moroccan Atlantic Sahara corner) (KAPLI *et al.* 2015).



Fig. 506: *Mesalina rubropunctata*, female. Merzouga.

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