



Fig. 316: Portrait of a Common Rock Lizard from Karachay-Cherkessia.

K. LOTIEV



Fig. 317: Dorsal pattern variation in the Common Rock Lizard.

K. LOTIEV

In spring, the ventral surface of the body, up to the collar, becomes dark orange or egg-yellow, with bright blue spots on the outer tips of ventral scales and the lateral bands in males. In females, the underside of the body is paler, in shades of yellowish, reddish, ashy-grey or whitish.

Distinguishing features: This species differs from Brauner's Rock Lizard by the following features: the upper postocular shield touches the parietal shield and the loreal very rarely touches the frontonasal shield. In the Common Rock Lizard, the average values of the main characters of pholidosis are lower, and there are no green shades in the colouration of the females.

Distribution and subspecies: The Common Rock Lizard is distributed on the northern slopes of the Rocky Range within the Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Region, the south of the Stavropol Territory and Kabardino-Balkaria, from the valley of the upstream waters of the Kuban River and its tributaries in the west to the gorge of the middle course of the Chegem River in the east. The

northernmost population exists in isolation on the southern foothills of the Stavropol Upland. The southern boundary of the distribution range runs along the north-eastern spurs of Mount Elbrus (in the gorge of the Kuban River) and, crossing the Rocky Range, continues further along its watershed in the headwaters of the rivers Kuma, Podkumsk, and others. Along the gorge of the Baksan River, the species is present to the town of Tyrny-Aus, and along the River Chegem, to the narrow gorge of the Chegem waterfalls.

There are no recognized subspecies.

Natural history: The Common Rock Lizard is a montane lacertid associated mainly with dry rocky habitats. These lizards willingly settle on the stone walls of human dwellings, ruins, and along the edges of mountain roads. Their altitudinal range extends from 800 to 1,400 m a.s.l. In the foothills of the Stavropol Territory, population densities are quite high, especially in areas with cracked rocks and at lower elevations. Historically, however, numbers declined sharply. In 1936, a hundred years after the description of this lizard from the vicinity of Kislovodsk, it could no longer be found there. This species is diurnal. It emerges from hibernation in February or March, and retreats again for overwintering in September–October, depending on elevation. In the surroundings of Kislovodsk, egg-laying, with clutches containing 1–5 eggs, was observed in late June or early July. Females deposit their eggs in loose soil, in gaps under stones and at other suitable places. Incubation lasts 50–55 days. Hatchlings have body lengths of 1.9–2.5 cm. Maturity is attained after the second hibernation.

The diet consists mainly of hymenopterans, acridoids, small beetles, dipterans, spiders, as well as small butterflies and worms. These lizards often catch insects in flight.

Conservation status:

Population numbers are quite high and stable within the species' range.

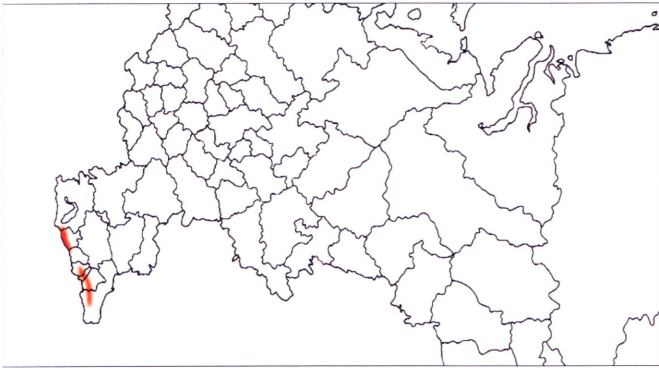
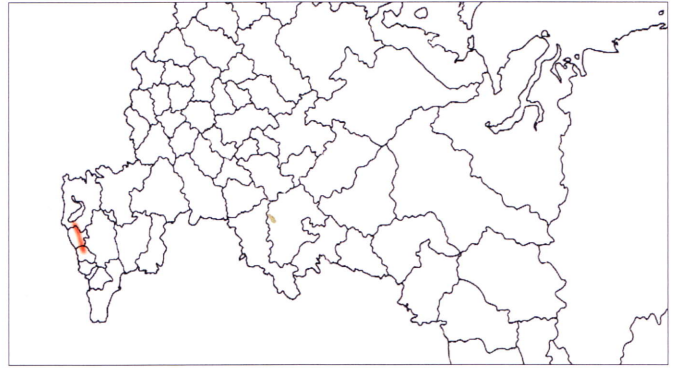
Genus *Eremias* WIEGMANN, 1834

Desert and steppe runners

Desert and steppe runners or racerunners are typical inhabitants of open deserts and semi-deserts, steppes and mountain biotopes. The size and habitus of racerunners differ depending on their lifestyle: slender and long-tailed species live on soft soils, while more massive and short-tailed ones live on solid grounds. The maximum body length is 9.8 cm.

Representatives of the genus have a narrow frontal shield and the occipital is absent or poorly expressed. The nostril is located between the 3–4 nasal shields and is widely separated from the supralabial. The masseteric shield is absent. Dorsal scales are small, granular, smooth, or have blunt keels. Ventral plates are quadrangular, smooth, and arranged in oblique rows. A large transparent shield on the lower eyelid is absent. Species living in sandy deserts, for example the Reticulate Desert Runner, *Eremias grammica*, may have enlarged, laterally projecting elongated scales on their toes, forming lateral fringes that act like snowshoes and allow them to run across loose sand. All species have femoral pores, but these are often very poorly developed and almost invisible.

Dorsal background colouration depends on that of the substrate. In species inhabiting sandy biotopes, sandy shades predominate.

Map 62: *Darevskia rudis*.Map 63: *Darevskia saxicola*.

Natural history: The Georgian Rock Lizard remains close to the rocks and rocky outcrops of terrains along the banks of rivers and on steep-sided slopes, mainly in the forest zone. In mountains, it lives at an elevation of up to 2,000 m a.s.l. This species uses cracks and gaps between stones as shelter. In general, the habits of the Georgian Rock Lizard are similar to those of the Common Rock Lizard. It maintains more or less permanent, small individual territories and protects them from conspecific intruders. The active season begins in February or March and ends in October or November. During the mating season, clashes regularly occur between males, resembling the "fights" of green lizards. When noticing each other from a certain distance, the males stop, firmly tighten their body from the sides and on extended forelimbs, somewhat sideways to each other, begin to draw closer, sometimes stopping and scraping the ground with their front legs. The weaker opponent usually cannot withstand the pressure and flies. Females produce 4–8 relatively large eggs (up to 16 mm long) in June–July. The young hatch in August or early September at a total length of 50–55 mm. The diet includes various insects, as well as spiders, molluscs and earthworms. Occasionally, this species also preys upon small lizards, including its own offspring.

Conservation status: The Georgian Rock Lizard is relatively common, forming stable and dense populations within its range. Nevertheless, the species is included in the Red Data Book of North Ossetia (Alania).

Common Rock Lizard

Darevskia saxicola (EVERSMANN, 1834)

Figs. 286, 314–317, Map 63

In 1834, Eduard Friedrich EVERSMANN published his only work in herpetology, *Lacerta Imperii Rossici variis in itineribus meis observatae*, in which he described several new species, including the Common Rock Lizard. Until recently, this species was divided into four subspecies, which are now considered full species.

External appearance: This species is a typical representative of the rock lizard group, moving with ease over rocky terrain. The head is flattened, the tail and legs are long, and the fingers have sharp, curved claws. The maximum body length is 7 cm, the tail is up to 13.2 cm. Males reach larger dimensions than females.

The rostral shield usually does not touch the frontonasal. The masseteric shield is either absent or of small to medium size. It is

separated from the first supratemporal shield by 2–4 small scales, and from the small tympanic shield by 2–5 small scales. The dorsal scales are small, round, smooth, and slightly convex, arranged in 41–74 rows around midbody. The row of femoral pores is long and reaches to the knee joint.

Colour and pattern are variable. In males, the upper side of the body can be grass green or other shades of green; females lack green shades in their colouration, and their back is more or less dark sandy-yellow in colour.

In the middle of the dorsum, there is a stripe made of a single or a double row of dark spots and flecks; on the flanks there are stripes of the same colour decorated with pale ocelli; these ocelli turn blue at chest level. The back pattern may be obscure and barely distinguishable in some specimens.



Figs. 314–315: Variation in ventral colouration in the Common Rock Lizard.

E. DUNAYEV