

Mesalina brevirostris Blanford 1874 **Short-snouted Lizard** (Fig. 55)

Mesalina brevirostris Blanford 1874: 32. Type locality: Tumb Island, Arabian Gulf, and Kalabagh, Punjab (restricted by Schmidt, 1939).

Mesalina pardalis Blanford 1876 (part)

Eremias brevirostris Boulenger 1887

Eremias bernoullii Schenkel 1901

Arabic: *sihliya qasirat al-anf*

Taxonomy: Two subspecies have been described: *M. b. microlepis* (Angel 1936) from western Syria and central Jordan, and *M. b. fieldi* (Haas and Werner 1969) from southwest Iran. Haas and Werner

(1969) referred populations from the remainder of the species' range to the nominate subspecies, but indicated that Arabian animals probably represent a distinct population. Arnold (1986b) states that this taxon is probably a complex involving more than one species. The Egyptian population is provisionally referred to the nominate subspecies.

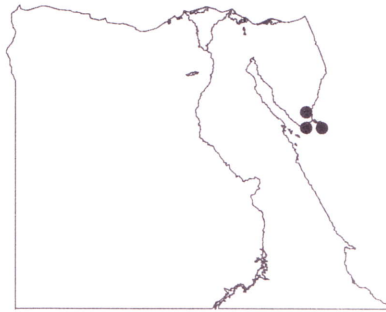
Subspecies in Egypt:

Mesalina brevirostris brevirostris Blanford 1874

Eremias brevirostris Hoofien 1957, Marx 1968, Werner 1982

Mesalina brevirostris Saleh 1997

Taxonomy: The Sinai animals differ slightly from Arabian populations examined in being less prominently spotted, with longer limbs and digits. Morphologically and ecologically *M. brevirostris* is most similar to the North African *M. rubropunctata*. The two species are parapatric and come into close proximity in Sinai.



Short-snouted Lizard
(*Mesalina brevirostris*)

Diagnosis: A small- to medium-sized, slightly depressed lizard, with a maximum SVL of 55 mm (Boulenger 1920). Snout distinctly short; usually with 4 supralabials anterior to the subocular, which usually does not reach the upper lip; nasal areas somewhat swollen; upper nasals in contact behind rostral. Lower eyelid with a window made of two large, semi-transparent scales of roughly equal size. Occipital scale absent or very small; temporals small, smooth; tympanic shield obvious. Dorsal scales small, granular. Average number of dorsals at mid-body 52 (range 46–55) and ventrals 12, respectively; average number of femoral pores 15 (13–17) (based on a sample of 5 Egyptian specimens). Dorsal side of tibia covered with smooth scales. Dorsal surfaces pinkish gray, with reddish and light spots, which might form a weak striated pattern; reddish spots are larger on the flanks and sides of tail. Venter white.

Variation: Juvenile plain pinkish gray with no pattern and a blue tail; a bluish hue is evident on posterior side of thighs. Very similar to juveniles of *M. rubropunctata*.

Habitat and ecology: In Sinai, animals have been found on gravel and sand plains with moderate vegetation cover not far from the coast. Near the tip of Ras Mohamed they are found in broken country made of uplifted fossil reef. In this region the species is sympatric with its congener *Mesalina olivieri*, which seems to prefer more dense halophytic vegetation.

Range: Sinai east through northern Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Arabian Gulf coasts to Pakistan.

Distribution in Egypt: Restricted to the southern tip of Sinai and the Island of Tiran. Recorded in Ras Mohamed National Park north along the Gulf of Suez to at least 27°48'N and in several of the large wadis that drain into the Gulf of Aqaba north to Wadi Kid. Its range on the Gulf of Suez coastal plain might extend much further north as no ecological or geographical barriers are apparent. First reported in Egypt by Hoofien (1957).

Status and conservation needs: Localized and uncommon. In Egypt it is Vulnerable on account of its small range (though most of it falls within protected areas). Classified as Least Concern by IUCN (2005).
