

THE ARMENIAN WALL LIZARD, *LACERTA ARMENIACA*,
MEHELY 1909, WITH NOTES ON ITS
CARE AND REPRODUCTION IN CAPTIVITY

BERT LANGERWERF

Beneden Kerkstraat 36A, NLS165CC Waspik, Netherlands

INTRODUCTION

In the Caucasus there are five species of lizards which are known to be parthenogenic:

- Lacerta dahli*, Darevsky 1957
- Lacerta rostombekovi*, Darevsky 1957
- Lacerta unisexualis*, Darevsky 1966
- Lacerta armeniaca*, Mehely 1909
- Lacerta uzzeli*, Darevsky & Danieljan 1977

All of these species are rock lizards, and are closely related to other species with similar habits, such as *Lacerta raddei*, *Lacerta valentini*, and *Lacerta saxicola*.

The fact, alone, that these five species can reproduce themselves without the presence of a male makes them very interesting. They are particularly interesting for the terrarium keeper because it is possible to breed them from only one individual.

PARTIAL DESCRIPTION*

Length: 73mm. The basic colour of the body, on the dorsum, is brownish green, dirty green, greenish yellow or olive yellow; the green colouration is more clearly developed on the anterior third of the body. A dorsal stripe is formed by small black or brown spots concentrated in a transverse manner along the centre of the back, not covering its entire width. Broad lateral stripes are formed by the merging together of dark irregularly shaped rings with light eye spots, one or two of which by the forelegs are blue. On the upper margin of the lateral stripes there is usually a row of clearly defined whitish spots. The venter is pale lemon yellow with alternating blue and small black spots along the edges of the ventral scales. The underparts of the head and the throat are white.

DISTRIBUTION*

The interior mountains of Armenia, within the borders of N.E. Turkey, Adzhar, southern Georgia, and northern Armenia, from where it extends into the adjacent mountainous parts of N.W. Azerbaijan.

ECOLOGY*

Lacerta armeniaca occurs in rocky areas, in stone piles, stony fields, and the sides of ravines in the wood and mountain-steppe zones at an altitude of 1700-2200m. In the mountain-steppe zone it may also be found amongst vegetation a great distance from stony or rocky areas. Up to 200 or more individuals have been observed on a walk of 1km. In Armenia the food consists chiefly of insects. Of the stomachs examined, membrane-winged insects were found in 45%, ants in 22%, beetles in 27%, orthopterans 26%, flies 33%, butterflies 19%, and spiders 11%. Also found were centipedes, earthworms and snails.

The population of this parthenogenic species is composed of females, which multiply without insemination. The number of eggs in one clutch is 2-5, most often 3-4; these measure, on average, 7.5-11mm and are laid from mid-June to the middle of July. The incubation period is about 55 days. The young ones appear towards the end of July or early in August. At the time of hatching they measure 24.5-26.5mm; by the following spring they reach 32-36mm; by the end of the summer 45-48mm; in the second spring, at a length of 47-49mm they reach maturity. The maximum length of 65-73mm is reached in the fourth year of life.

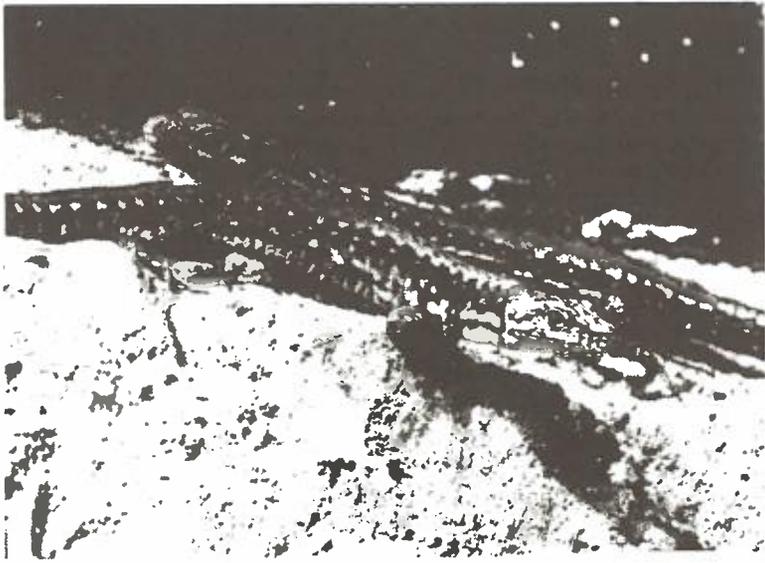


Plate 1. *Lacerta armeniaca*

Lacerta armeniaca in captivity

I have kept this interesting species successfully for many years in my garden terraria. This species lives in nature in areas very similar to those inhabited by *Lacerta muralis* in the West, and can be kept in the same way that *L. muralis* can be kept. I have had success in both glass and gauze covered terraria. A rather small terrarium of 70 x 50cm is sufficient to house about five individuals, because as there are no males (in nature there is said to be a ratio of one male to every thousand females) there is no fighting. The terrarium must always afford a frost-proof retreat in the winter and cool hiding places in summer. I provide these retreats with old roofing tiles inserted obliquely into the ground to a depth of about one foot. A layer of hay or leaves improves the situation. If kept under glass a dietary supplement of vitamin D3 is needed (see my article on *Lacerta strigata* in the BHS Bulletin No. 1, June 1980, for further details).

Kept in these terraria, the lizards have only a short hibernation: they may remain active until the end of November, and may emerge again early in February, depending on the severity or mildness of the winter. After hibernation there is of course no copulation, but the females become more beautiful in colour: the green and the small blue spots intensify. Then eggs begin to develop, each female usually laying two clutches between the middle of May and the middle of June. When the eggs are kept at a temperature of 30°C the length of incubation is about 40 days; the young emerge from the beginning to the end of July. The juveniles have blue tails with small black spots. After only one month the blue colour disappears; if kept warm and fed well they reach maturity in about one year.

Like *Lacerta strigata*, this is an interesting lizard which can be kept here in Western Europe without extra energy costs. In the next Bulletin I hope to be able to discuss another lizard with the same qualities. By the time this article appears I will be the happy owner of some 10 *Lacerta unisexualis*, one of the other parthenogenic species, received from friends in the Soviet Union. Perhaps after some years I will also be able to write about this species.

* These sections are translated from the Russian, taken from the book: "The Amphibians and Reptiles of the Soviet Union" by A.G. Bannikov, I.S. Darevsky, V.G. Ishchenko, A.K. Rustanov, N.N. Cherbak. Moscow 1977. This is an excellent book of over 400 pages, comprehensively describing 400 species and subspecies of the Soviet herpetofauna. The book contains many illustrations, mainly in colour, and 135 maps.

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