

## THE CONTINUING STORY OF LIZARD HILL

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*Reptiles are target species in Dutch nature conservation. Monitoring populations serves as a tool for the evaluation of nature conservation. The Dutch reptile monitoring program started in 1993 with 170 plots where reptiles are counted at least seven times a year by volunteers (Zuiderwijk et al in press). The monitoring network has been steadily growing since then. During 1999 240 plots have been searched. Plots are located in all major reptile areas over the country. About 80 monitoring trajects are situated in the dunes. Most of these habitats are inhabited by Sand Lizards. In the following text one of the volunteers describes his observations from a dune patch during 1999. Apart from just counting the lizards, he makes photographs, which enables him to recognise the lizards individually.*

### LIZARD HILL

The year 1999 started quite early for Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*) monitoring on a cool clear sunny 27 March; on this day I began for the seventh season in a row my monitoring traject. No lizards were seen on Lizard Hill but the first brave animals were awake and enjoying the spring outside of my research area. Nineteen visits followed and ended on a warm if a little windy 18 September when nine newborn and one adult animal were seen on this, the last monitoring visit of the year, 1999.

In this last year of the century twenty six individual lizards were photographed on Lizard Hill, one of the seven patches that are part of my monitoring traject. Lizard Hill has been over the years the most interesting and I photographed more lizards there than any other of my patches. The following results come from this hill that has every thing a lizard needs to lead a comfortable life.

### TWELVE OLD FRIENDS AND FOURTEEN NEW LIZARDS

During 1999 twelve Sand Lizards from previous years and fourteen new animals were observed and photographed; the first of the newborn lizards were observed on Lizard Hill on the 13 August.

Four of the fourteen new lizards that were photographed were newborn and all have a clear and different pattern so with a little bit of luck maybe I can follow one of these newborn animals throughout their lives.

I do not give the lizards names only an individual number and from 1993 until 1999 I have photographed 86 different lizards. Animals number 1 to number 9 were photographed during my first year (1993); only one of them, number 9, was still present in the 1999 season. She is nine years old now, the oldest lizard of the group.



Plate 1: Photograph of Lizard Hill and the author.



Plate 2: Female lizard number 40 has no spots or stripes but an equal brownish colour.

SANDLIZARDS - KATWIJK "LIZARD HILL" 1999																										
individuals:	9	37	38	39	40	50	53	62	64	68	69	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86
1993	*																									
1994																										
1995	*																									
1996	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
1997	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
1998	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
year of birth:	90	92	94	94	95	95	94	96	96	96	96	96	97	96	96	96	96	96	97	96	96	97	99	99	99	99
DATE	1999	f±e	m	f±e	m	f±e	m	f	m	m	m	sf	sf	m	m	m	f	m	sf	m	f	sf	juv	juv	juv	juv
spring	Apr 02																									
	Apr 23	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	Apr 29	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	May 07	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	May 15	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	May 21	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	May 26	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
summer	June 10	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	June 24	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	July 04	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	July 10					eggs																				
	July 16	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	July 24																									
late-sum	Aug 06																									
	Aug 13																									
	Aug 28																									
	Sep 18																						*	*	*	*
	Sep 12																						*	*	*	*

**Table 1:** Individual numbers of the 26 lizards which have been photographed in 1999 on Lizard Hill. Twelve lizards were photographed in previous years. The year of birth is estimated. Abbreviations: m = male, f = female, f±e = female with eggs, sf = subadult female, juv = newborn lizard.

In the table the 26 lizards of 1999 are listed with their individual number, their estimated year of birth and their presence in previous years.

### PATTERN DEVIATION

One would expect that newborn animals should inherit the colour pattern of their parents to a certain degree. But this is not always visible. Juvenile 84 for example has the same characteristic pattern as female 40 (see photograph) but is not one of her offspring. So this gene that produced lizards without spots, stripes etc. is not only confined to female 40.

As can be seen in the table, male lizard 37 was seen again after a season of absence during 1998. This male appears relatively rarely on the hill, only three times in 1999, just as it did in 1996 and 1997: he is a visiting male only turning up for the mating season. He comes just to look for the pretty women on Lizard Hill, I presume.

Female lizard 38 was again present for the fourth season in a row as was male 39 which is the most dominant male and the least shy animal on the hill. Female 40 was photographed 15 times this year and only missing from her home spot when egg laying during a week in July. Numbers 62, 64, 68, 69 and 72 were animals that made their first appearances in 1998.

### **SOME SAD GOODBYES**

Sadly female lizards 20 and 32 were not seen in year 1999, not returning from hibernation. I first photographed female 20 way back in August 1994 and female 32 in July 1995. Since then they were regularly observed and will be missed. Male lizards 50 and 53 seem to have said farewell to Lizard Hill, since they were absent from late spring on, but maybe one of these two males will return next spring. The disappearance of female 9 since early June is the saddest lost, possibly not returning from the perils of an egg laying trip. She was first photographed in August 1993 as a young adult making her 9 years old or more. Female 9 was observed 3 times in 1999 including together with male 39 soon after mating had taken place; her last appearance on the hill was on the 26th of May: she will be sadly missed. To conclude 1999 will be remembered most for the sad losses of the three female lizards 9, 20 and 32. I am however looking forward to the year 2000 and monitoring of THE LIZARDS OF LIZARD HILL.

### **REFERENCES**

Zuiderwijk, A., A. Groenveld & G. Smit (in press). Monitoring of reptiles in the Netherlands. *Proceedings of the 9th OGM of the Societas Europaea Herpetologica* 1998, Le Bourget du Lac, France.