

## THE TAYGETOS LIZARD, *LACERTA GRAECA* BEDRIAGA 1886, AND ITS REPRODUCTION IN CAPTIVITY

BERT LANGERWERF

P.O. Box 82, NL5165ZH Waspik, Netherlands

### INTRODUCTION

It is a pity that most "Lacerta" keepers stick to *Lacerta viridis*, *Lacerta lepida* and such kinds of eye-catching species. There is a whole series of *Lacerta* species which is certainly as interesting and attractive as their bigger cousins. I have kept lizards now for many years, and had my first *Lacerta* already 25 years ago, and I must say that I feel myself as attracted to the smaller mountain lizards for the following reasons:

1. In N.W. Europe they are active in outdoor terraria for a much longer part of the year, having a shorter hibernation.
2. They prefer more humidity and less heat, which makes them very suitable to keep here.
3. They don't need large terraria and can be kept in terraria of 2 feet square upwards.
4. There are many species and their relationships with each other are in need of further research.

One of the mountain lizards I keep and want to discuss now is the Greek mountain lizard, *Lacerta graeca*. *L. graeca* is a greyish brown lizard with block dots on the body and tail, and with lighter dots on the flanks. It is similar to *Podarcis muralis* in size, or slightly larger. The head is flattened, as with many mountain lizards, to enable it to hide in small spaces between rocks. The male, particularly, has bright blue spots above the front legs. There is a good illustration of a pair in "A Field Guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of Europe" by Arnold, Burton & Ovenden, 1977. Hatchlings have bluish, turquoise tails, but not as bright as in some other mountain lizards.

It lives in the Vassai and Taygetos mountains, of the Peloponnese, Greece (Bischoff 1980), where it occupies humid places. In the Vassai mountains it is found along brooks or moss covered trees. In rocky areas it is replaced by the more robust *Podarcis peloponnesiaca*. In the Taygetos mountains, it is more dominant, and is found in all types of environment when there is sufficient humidity: it is not restricted to trees, but lives more in the rocks and stones along the mountain brooks. Here *Podarcis peloponnesiaca* is absent.

### *LACERTA GRAECA* IN THE TERRARIUM

In late July and early August 1979 my friend Wolfgang Bischoff of Bonn visited the Peloponnese. During that visit he observed many *L. graeca*, but he saw no hatchlings at that time. He took some lizards back to Germany and so I received from him on 19 August, 1979, 4 individuals from the Vassai Mountains, and 5 from the Taygetos. After their first hibernation here in Holland, on the 1st May 1980 I noticed that several females were already very gravid. On 7 May I found three individuals dead from wounds caused by other lizards. As the bigger *Lacerta rudis svanetica* lived in this terrarium too, I assumed that they were guilty, so I isolated two pairs of *L. graeca* in a separate terrarium. Too late, because after an absence of several days abroad, I noticed that it was the females which, just after laying eggs, attacked all the other *L. graeca*, both males and females. This resulted in the death of all the *L. graeca*. Even the smallest bite caused the death of the lizards within a week, in spite of my efforts to treat the wounds. I never before observed such a phenomenon in any of my lizards. Also, in later years, in 1981, 1982 and 1983 I did not notice this behaviour in breeding *L. graeca*. At the end of May 1980, I was left with only the eggs of *L. graeca*. Luckily they hatched and after hibernation in the winter of 1980-81 they reproduced within their first year of life. Alas, they only lay 2-3 eggs and so I never bred many, yet I managed to breed them each year from 1980 onwards. Births were: 1980 (8); 1981 (8); 1982(9) and 1983 (8). The following table gives the dates of reproduction.

Date of Oviposition	Date Eggs Discovered	Number of Eggs	Date Eggs Hatched	Length of Incubation (Temp. $\pm 29^{\circ}\text{C}$ )
12 May 1980	12 May 1980	5 (Infertile)	19 June (1) 21 " (2) 22 " (1)	38 days 40 " 42 "
$\pm$ 11 May 1980	25 May 1980	4	5 July (4)	41 " + 14 days ( $\pm 15^{\circ}\text{C}$ )
30 June 1981	3 July 1981	7 (2 clutches)	16 August (2) 17 " (1) 24 " (1) 25 " (1)	44 days + 3 days ( $\pm 20^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) 45 " + 3 " " 52 " + 3 " " 53 " + 3 " "
? ?	18 July 1981 ?	2 ?	31 " (2) 6 September (1)	44 " + ?
$\pm$ 1 July 1982 ?	2 July 1982 21 July 1982	5 ?	14 August (1) 4 " (3) 6 " (1) 7 " (2) 8 " (2)	43 days + 1 day ( $\pm 20^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) 14 " + ? " 16 " + ? " 17 " + ? " 18 " + ? "
? 1983	? 1983	?	19 August (1) 20 " (3) 21 " (2)	? ? ?
?	23 July 1983	4 clutches of 3-4 eggs each	1 September (1) 6 " (1)	40 days + ? 45 " + ?

Table 1. Dates of egg-laying and length of incubation of *Lacerta graeca*

Where I was unsure of the number of eggs I found them together with the eggs of other lizards.

During the winter of 1981-82 some *L. graeca* died in a garden terrarium, which had become quite humid. Of the 9 hatchlings of 1982, 7 survived (1 male, 6 females) their first hibernation, even though the weather of spring 1983 was very bad until the end of May; and they even had 4 clutches of 3-4 eggs per clutch, found by me on July 23rd. Perhaps because of the bad weather only two of these eggs hatched. A striking thing noticeable from the table is that in 1980 the period of reproduction was 6-7 weeks earlier than in all the subsequent years when I only worked with lizards born in Holland.

In 1981 and 1983 I noticed that *L. graeca* is able to reproduce within one year of birth, even after hibernation. So it is quite possible that in nature, where the climate is better than here behind glass, all lizards reproduce each summer.

#### FOOD

As are all my other smaller lizards, these are fed chiefly on crickets, which they eat readily. Also in summer they are fed a variety of insects collected wild, such as caterpillars of various sorts, grasshoppers, flies, etc. The adults are also given giant mealworms (*Zophobas morio*). Vitamin D3 ("Aquosum") is always added to the drinking water (about 10,000-20,000 I.U. per litre) and some calcium.

#### SEX RATIO OF HATCHLINGS

As with other *Lacertidae* I noticed no sign of sexual determination by incubation temperatures: there were always a fair proportion of both males and females.

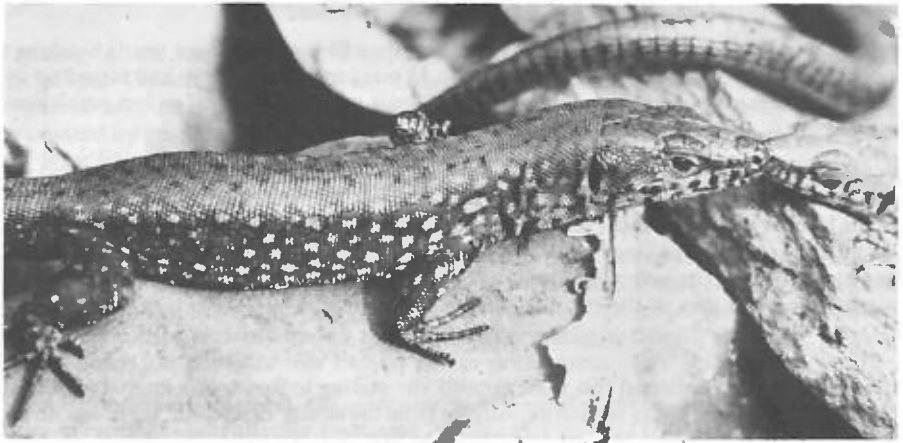


Plate 1. *Lacerta graeca*, female.

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