



Mesalina rubropunctata
(LICHTENSTEIN, 1823)

LC

Habitat: Arid stony and rocky flat desert including hyper-arid areas, especially in regs without any vegetation and in borders of ergs.

Biology: Active throughout the year. Mating occurs from March to June, females deposit their 3–7 eggs in 2–3 clutches before the first half of July, and the hatchlings emerge after two months of development. *Mesalina rubropunctata* feed chiefly upon ants and

Common names: Red-spotted Small Lizard (E), Érémiás à points rouges (F), Mesalina de las Hamadas (S).

Range: From Mauritania and Morocco, including the Atlantic Sahara, to Egypt and Sudan through Mali, Algeria, Libya and Niger.

Distribution in Morocco: There are few records from the hyper-arid Saharan regions of Morocco, including the Atlantic Sahara. *Mesalina rubropunctata* does not occur close to the Atlantic coast possibly because the climate is too humid.

Altitude: 10–1,150 m.

Identification: A small lizard, but larger and more prominent than the other species of *Mesalina*, reaching up to about 60 mm SVL. Has a bulky general appearance. Twelve longitudinal rows of ventral plates (ten in the other species of the genus). Dorsal background colour from brown, yellowish to grey with four rows of striking white dots bordered with dark red-black spots. Ventral colour whitish. Very prominent nostrils, nasal scales not in full contact and the internasal typically reaching the rostral.



Fig. 507: *Mesalina rubropunctata*, male. Oum el Alex.

J. ALVAREZ



Fig. 508: *Mesalina rubropunctata*, patternless individual. Tinduf (Algeria). D. DONAIRE



Fig. 509: *Mesalina rubropunctata*, Erg Chebbi. B. REBOLLO FERNÁNDEZ



Fig. 510: *Mesalina rubropunctata*, road-killed female with clutch exposed. Merzouga. J.M. PLEGUEZUELOS

beetles. Juveniles are heavily preyed upon by fat-tailed scorpions (*Androctonus* spp.).

Remarks: This lineage likely originated from Arabia or the Middle East from where *M. rubropunctata* dispersed into Africa during the Middle Miocene (KAPLI *et al.* 2015).



Fig. 511: Juvenile *Mesalina rubropunctata* from 30 km northwest of Ausserd.

M. GENIEZ

Mesalina simoni (BOETTGER, 1881)

LC

Common names: Simon's Small Lizard (E), Erémiás de Simon (F), Mesalina de Simon (S).

Range: Endemic to Morocco.

Distribution in Morocco: Steppic vegetation in the Atlantic region from the western High Atlas to the coastal plains, southwards to Paradis Plage (15 km northwest of Agadir; Philippe GENIEZ), northwards to Ben Slimane (Jacques BONS) and eastwards to Sidi Daoui (6 km northwest of Oued Zem; Pascal ESCUDIÉ), from the lowlands to over 1,100 m a. s. l. (Oued Ourika Valley; Philippe ROUX). Apparently allopatric with *M. olivieri*.

Altitude: 0–1,020 m.

Identification: A small lizard, up to about 50 mm SVL. Very similar to *Mesalina olivieri* from which it can be distinguished by the weakly marked longitudinal dorsal stripes, usually strongly pigmented (in adult males dark grey) ventral and gular scales, a palpebral disc with 7–8 scales that are opaque or translucent and never bordered with black. The base of the tail is thick in males.

Habitat: Arid, rocky plateaus with sparse vegetation.



Fig. 512: Portrait of a male *Mesalina simoni*. 10 km past Chichaoua towards Marrakech.

P. GENIEZ

Biology: Likely similar to that of *M. olivieri*, although exact data on the biology of this species are lacking.

Remarks: Initially considered a subspecies of *Mesalina olivieri* but later given species rank based on morphological differences. A recent genetic study suggests that *M. simoni* falls in a clade also comprising several populations previously assigned to *M. olivieri*, outside of the known range of *M. simoni* (KAPLI *et al.* 2015). Therefore, *M. simoni* seems to be not endemic to the plateau north of the High Atlas but occurs also in southeastern Morocco (regions of Goulmima and Bouarfa).

