

Mesalina olivieri (AUDOUIN, 1829)
Olivier's sand lizard

Hebrew name: *Midbarit Pasim* ("striped desert lizard")

Recent taxonomic changes: None.

Size: Up to 164 mm total length, SVL 20–53 mm; weight 0.1–5 g. Males and females reach similar sizes.

Description: Brown or gray, with yellow or brown stripes on the back, and white dots between the stripes. Young individuals exhibit a more conspicuous pattern, which fades as they mature. The tail is yellow, twice as long as the body, and detachable.

Similar species: *Mesalina bahaeldini* (p. 176). The dorsal pattern of *M. olivieri* contains dark color patches forming near-continuous lines whereas in *M. bahaeldini* there is no clear stripes pattern and no black coloring; *Mesalina bahaeldini* is found on harder soils and rocky ground and *M. olivieri* on sandy or mixed sand soils.

Natural history and behavior: Found in vegetation-rich loess or sandy flatlands. While it has a distinct affinity for sands it is by no means a dune species, preferring regions



Fig. 144: *Mesalina olivieri*, northern Negev.

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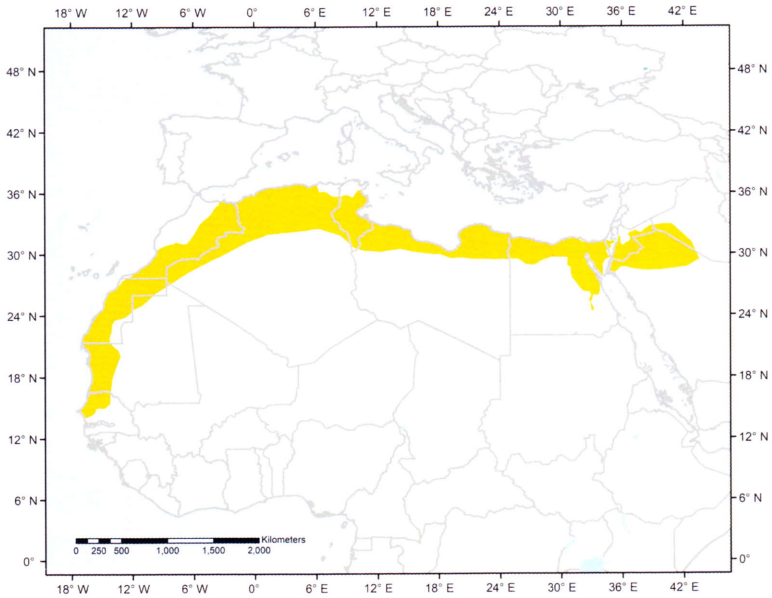
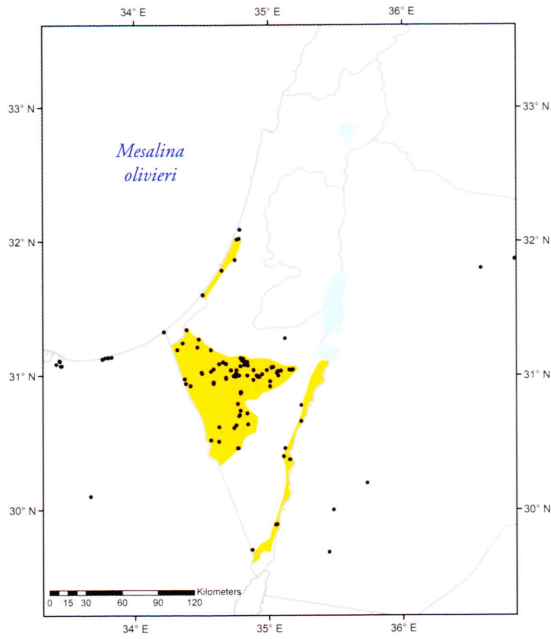




Fig. 145: *Mesalina olivieri*, northern Negev.

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with thin layers of sand mixed with other soils. Activity occurs on the ground during the morning and early evening. Usually smaller and slower than the syntopic Bosk's fringe-fingered lizard. When not active it mostly hides in burrows but is occasionally seen on top of shrubs. Its diet consists of small arthropods. Mating habits are similar to those of the small-spotted lizard. 1–3 clutches, each of 1–4 eggs, are laid each season. Young appear as early as June, and individuals usually survive for only a single breeding season. **Distribution in Israel:** The Negev, the Arava valley. Probably extinct from the southern coastal plain.

World distribution: Senegal northwards to Western Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, northern Libya, northern and eastern Egypt, Israel, Jordan, western Iraq, southern Syria, and northern Saudi Arabia.

Conservation: IUCN Status: In Israel: Least Concern; Global: Least Concern (stable populations). While the global range, being large and under relatively few threats (except perhaps from climate change) probably make it of Least Concern, we cannot share the notion that it is safe in Israel. Its affinity to sands, albeit not to dunes, makes it likely that this lizard is highly threatened in the Arava sands, and may well have already become extinct in the northern parts of its distribution in the coastal plain. We consider it to be highly likely that this species is threatened and should be assessed under the IUCN criterion A for declining populations. As with many species, an urgent update of its status, last reviewed in 2002, is in order.