

Lacertidæ BATSCH, 1788

Algyroides moreoticus BIBRON & BORY DE SAINT-VINCENT, 1833
Greek Algyroides

Etymology. The generic nomen '*Algyroides*' is seemingly composed of the Latin adjective '*algyrus*', meaning 'Algerian', Hellenised as '*algyrus*', and of the Greek suffix '*eidōs*' (εἶδος), '*-oïdes*' (-ειδής), meaning 'looking like' or 'shaped like'. The species of the genus *Algyroides* have nothing to do with Algeria, but looked like *Psammodromus algyrus*, another lacertid Mediterranean species, to the French scientists describing them. The species nomen '*moreoticus*' is a Latin adjective that comes from the noun '*Moreas*', an ancient name of the Peloponnese in medieval times, because silk culture was rife then, so mulberry trees where a common cultivation and sight. '*Moreas*' derives from the classical Greek word '*moron*' meaning the mulberry tree (*Morus* sp.).

Description. A small lizard with a total length of 15 cm, of which the snout–vent length is 5 cm. Males are grey-brown above and whitish below. They have dark grey flanks with beige or whitish spots and often two beige dorsolateral stripes. On Cephalonia

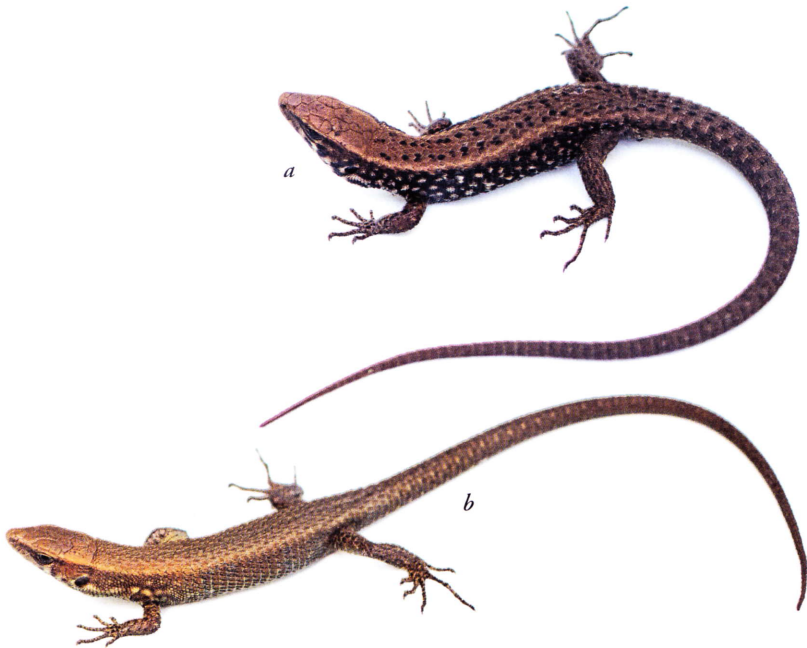


Fig. 267: *Algyroides moreoticus*, adult male (a) and young female (b).

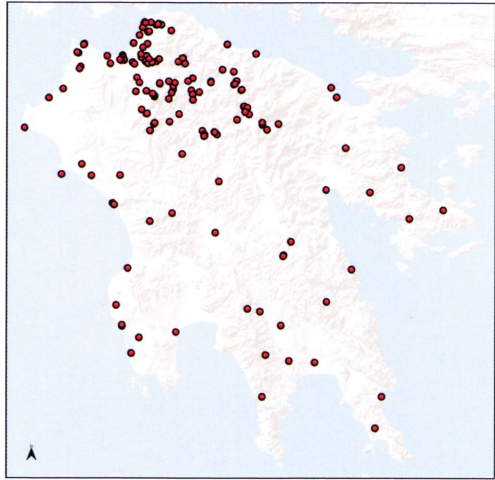
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Figs. 268–269: *Algyroides moreoticus*, female (above) and male (below).

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Map 21: Distribution of *Algyroides moreoticus* in the Peloponnese.



and Ithaca islands, the same species also occurs, but its stripes, spots and throats are blue, turquoise or light green, while on Zakynthos Island they are yellow. Females are uniform grey-brown above and whitish below, while juveniles are dark grey-brown. Neonates are similar to adult females in colour, and they have no bright tail as other lacertids have. There is a serrated collar on the throat, with 6–9 scales. The dorsal and lateral scales are pointed and deeply keeled, giving a rough appearance and touch.

Similar species. In Peloponnese, it can only be confused with *Hellenolacerta græca*. But *Algyroides moreoticus* is small, with keeled scales on the back and the flanks, and a large masseteric (cheek) plate. On the other side, *H. græca* is never striped, has a more elongate head and snout, two (vs. one) postnasal scales and no large cheek scales. Baby *H. græca* have turquoise tails, while they are brown in baby *A. moreoticus*.

Distribution. A Greek endemic species, common practically everywhere in Peloponnese. It is present on the small nearshore Peloponnese islands Psili and Sapienza, while outside Peloponnese, it occurs on the Ionian islands of Zakynthos, Marathonisi, Strophades, Cephalonia and Ithaca.

Habitat. A ground dwelling species, but it climbs well on walls and trees. It can be found in a variety of habitats from yards in large cities and villages, to dense forests and open places. Usually in dense vegetation or forest edges, olive groves, pine, oak or fir forests with leaf litter and dead branches on the ground overgrown with climbers, riverside vegetation with plane trees, in upland pasture inside bramble and other bushes. Very common at low and middle altitudes from sea level to 1,500 metres. Their small size, dark colour and rough skin make these lizards blend in with their environment where they can be hard to spot. They often bask inside bushes, what makes them even more difficult to find. This species is typically described as a ‘widely foraging hunter’ in deep leaf litter.





Fig. 271: *Algyroides moreoticus*, juvenile.

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Notes on natural history. *Algyroides moreoticus* is a relict species, together with all the members of the genus in Europe, which survived both the expansion of *Podarcis* wall lizards, better adapted to arid conditions, and the gradual aridification and the establishment of the Mediterranean climate during the Pliocene.

It prefers cooler conditions than most other lizards, more humid microhabitats and more vegetated habitats. While it is active all year round, it is easier to see on sunny winter days than during the summer. It can be seen basking on sunny days but more often basks in shade or in cloudy, cool weather. It is not uncommon to find them after showers and with windy conditions in spring. When basking, it does not stay long at the same spot, it moves a lot. This species has been known to live up to ten years in captivity, but 5–6 years is the norm in the wild.

Feeding. No studies have been conducted for its feeding ecology. Presumably it consumes small invertebrates.

◁ Fig. 270: *Algyroides moreoticus*, female. Often, these lizards bask in the undergrowth. Ph. KATSIYIANNIS



Fig. 272: *Algyroides moreoticus*, mating pair.

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Breeding behaviour. Pairs bask together in spring, but with some distance between them, e.g., from 50 cm to 1–2 metres. They do not touch each other as species of *Podarcis* do, but they may share the same log. Mating takes place from middle March at low altitudes, to the end of May on the mountains. We have witnessed a copulation in Feneos area, which happened in May, at 1,000 metres of altitude. During mating, the male holds the female biting her at the lower flank. After mating, the two animals stayed locked, absolutely still, with the male biting and holding the female, for more than 2 hours. This behaviour is supposed to be a post-copulatory, female-guarding behaviour. The pair was mating on the upper surface of a low rock, about 20 cm from the ground, inside a low bush, exactly on a spot where they would have chosen to bask.

Conservation status. Least Concern (LC) according to the IUCN.

Systematic note. It is a monotypic species, but no genetic research has yet been done for ascertaining the species' diversity.