

THE SAND LIZARD

Lacerta agilis Linnaeus, 1758

25

Sand Lizard from
Vitosha

A species common in Europe and Asia, whereby to the west its range extends to the eastern half of the Pyrenees and the northeastern corner of Spain, and in the east Lake Baikal, the eastern region of the Seven rivers, Northern Mongolia and Western China. The northern border of its distribution in Europe passes through the middle of Great Britain, Southern Sweden, the region of Saint Petersburg (in places to the north of the 60° latitude), by gradually turning to the south up to 52° in Eastern Siberia. The southern border passes through Southern France, the Alps (in Italy it can be found only there), the Balkan peninsula (without the southern part of Greece), the northern coasts of the Black Sea, including the Crimean peninsula, Northeastern Turkey, Caucasia, the northern shores of the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea and Lake Balkhash.

In Bulgaria, the Sand Lizard is found mainly in Western Bulgaria, where it inhabits wet meadows in the high fields and in the mountains up to altitudes of 2000 m (in Vitosha and Rila), and in Osogovo mountain it has been reported at an altitude of 2200 m. In the eastern half of the country singular individuals have been found sporadically in the Balchik region (non-confirmed for a long time now), in the regions of Varna and Strandzha. The subspecies status of the Bulgarian Sand Lizards has not been specified. Some authors insist that the individuals from the mountains of Western Bulgaria must be related to *L. a. bosnica* Schreiber, 1912, and those from Eastern Bulgaria – to *L. a. chersonensis* (Andrzejowski, 1832); it is possible, however, for the Eastern Bulgarian populations to belong to *L. a. euxinica* (Fuhn & Vancea, 1964). The picture is made more difficult because of the great inter-population and individual variability of the scales and the colouring of the lizards, because of their marked sex dimorphism and their sporadic presence in Eastern Bulgaria.

The Sand Lizard is a diurnal species. For shelter it uses holes under the stones and stumps, as well as holes of rodents and moles, but it digs out its own underground tunnels too. It feeds mainly on insects, most often grass-hoppers. Fertilization, depending on altitude and the specific weather of the year, is from the end of April to the middle of June. Eggs (4–15, most often 4–8) are laid from the beginning of June to the middle of August. Outside Bulgaria, a second laying has also been observed, about a month after the first one. The incubation period is about 55–65 days. The juveniles differ in their colouring from the adults in the absence of green pigment (but most of the adults do not have it too) and in the presence of one or two brown or gray-brown longitudinal stripes on the back, surrounded by thin light bands; with the growing of the lizard, the bands “tear” into separate spots situated in one or two rows.

In Bulgaria, the Sand Lizard is protected by Annex II of the Berne Convention. Its populations, especially in the mountains of Western Bulgaria, are stable. In the northwestern part of the area, however, in many places the existing isolated populations are endangered by the destruction of their habitats (natural meadows) because of the growth of urban areas, industrial zones, road construction, etc.

