

EUROLIZARDS

Lacerta agilis - Sand Lizard



Subsp. agilis, male; D / Düsseldorf, 29.04.2017 - Note the green flanks and the characteristic back pattern.

The genus *Lacerta* comprises a group of eye-catching green lizards which may even have inspired the fantasy of our ancestors. Hence, it gave its name to the whole Lacertid family.

The smallest member of this genus, *Lacerta agilis*, has been designed for the continental Eurasian area: A ground-dwelling lizard with robust body and short head which can even cope with Siberian climate but is quite sensitive to heat.

It inhabits a huge area in temperate Eurasia - from the Pyrenees to China. In south of its range it is restricted to mountain habitats whereas in the north it is rather a lowland species which even occupies coastal dunes (as the common name "Sand Lizard" implies). With its brownish-green colouration it is well camouflaged in the open grassy areas of central-eastern Europe.

In our area, the following subspecies occur:

- The *nominata subspecies* covers western Central Europe and southern Scandinavia;
- *Subspecies argus* lives in eastern Central Europe (eastern Germany to Romania);
- *Subspecies bosnica* occurs in the mountain ranges of the Balkans, to northern Greece in the south;
- *Subspecies chersonensis* lives in Eastern Europe (Romanian Black Sea coast to eastern Poland);
- *Subspecies garzoni* is restricted to a small area in the Pyrenees.

Males may be confused with other green lizards (*Lacerta bilineata*, *Lacerta viridis*). However, *Lacerta agilis* is smaller with a compact body. It can also be easily identified by its characteristic back pattern (see pictures). Juveniles of *Lacerta agilis* show characteristic lateral rows of light ocelli.

Lacerta agilis may co-occur with *Podarcis muralis* (or other *Podarcis* species) and *Zootoca vivipara* from which it can be distinguished by frequently showing a light vertebral line. *Fremias arguta* at the Romanian Black Sea Coast may look similar to female *Lacerta agilis* but that latter one has a thicker tail.

In Central Europe, this species is highly threatened by intensive agriculture, clear landscapes without microstructures, "orderly" private gardens and straying domestic cats.



The distribution area of *Lacerta agilis*.



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Subsp. agilis, male: D / Bad Münstereifel, 25.04.2011 - A bright green male during mating season.



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Subsp. agilis, male: D / Calw, 04.05.2014 - These lizards frequently bask on dry grass.



Subsp. agilis, juvenile: D / Düsseldorf, 24.09.2017 - Juveniles frequently show characteristic light ocelli on the flanks and a light vertebral line.



Subsp. argus, male: RO / Banat, 01.06.2013 - Lacerta agilis argus frequently shows reddish backs. Sometimes, this subspecies is regarded as



Subsp. argus, male: RO / Banat, 31.05.2013 - This specimen shows a brownish back with irregular pattern.



Subsp. bosnica, male: MNE / Durmitor, 05.07.2015 - *Lacerta agilis bosnica* differs from the nominate subspecies by its continuous light vertebral line.



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Subsp. bosnica, female - MNE / Biogradska NP, 31.07.2012 - Note the continuous light vertebral line.



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Subsp. bosnica, female: GR / Peristeri Mountains - A female with beautiful contrasting pattern.



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Subsp. chersonensis, female: RO / Hîstria, 26.05.2013



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Subsp. garzoni, male: F / Pyrénées-Orientales, 20.08.2016 - *Lacerta agilis garzoni* is more compactly built with shorter limbs than the nominate subspecies.



A hillside habitat of *Lacerta agilis* in western Germany, where it co-occurs with *Anguis fragilis* and *Coronella austriaca*.

