

Lacerta trilineata BEDRIAGA, 1886
Balkan green lizard (Lacertidae)

There are two large lacertid lizards on the islands, the Balkan and the Eastern Green lizard, *Lacerta viridis*, of which the Balkan green lizard is by far the most widespread and most frequently seen. It can easily be observed basking along roadsides and is often run over by cars. The two species may at first glance look quite similar, but with a little experience one should be able to tell them apart, even without looking at the diagnostic characters. It is possible that there are populations on all of the Diapontia islands, but we have found the species on Othoni only. It has never been encountered on Paxos and we have not been able to find it neither here nor on Vido from where it has been reported in the literature. It is quite possible it was once found on this very small islet when it was more open and not covered by pine trees. On Othoni the species seems to be far less common and much more cautious. This behaviour may well be linked to the few people on the island as well as to predation by cats outside the tourist season when food is scarce.

L. trilineata is the third largest lizard and the second largest legged lizard in Europe. Adults have a uniform yellowish green colour and yellow belly and throat and scales



Fig. 218: The dark and light vermiculate markings on the top of the head are characteristic of *Lacerta trilineata*. The species may occasionally show some shade of blue or bluish green on the head and throat but there is almost always a yellow tint that also separates it from *Lacerta viridis*.



Fig. 219: Adult female *Lacerta trilineata major*.



Fig. 220: Head of adult male *Lacerta trilineata major*.



Fig. 221: Subadult male *Lacerta trilineata major* still possessing the stripes of juveniles.



Fig. 222: Typical juvenile *Lacerta trilineata major* with three light dorsal lines and an additional lateral dotted line.

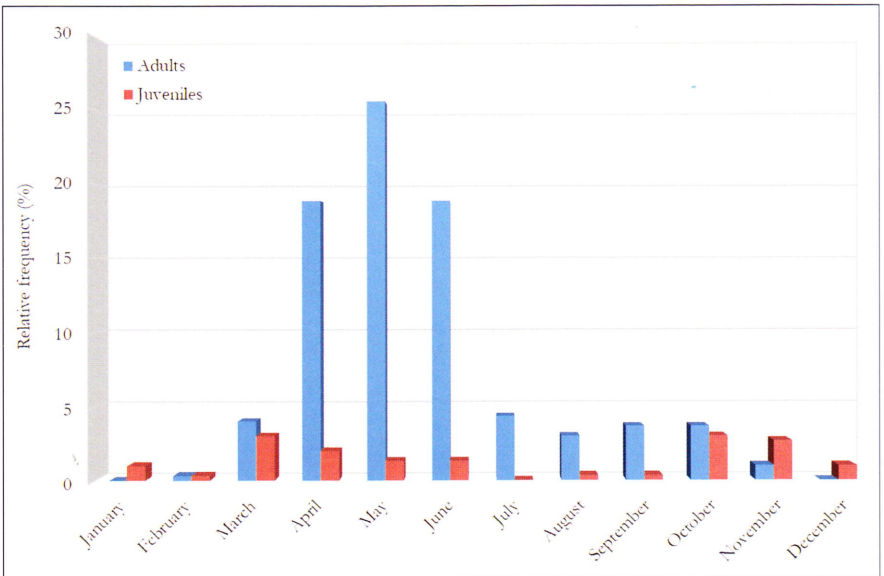


Fig. 223: Relative monthly observation frequency (%) for *Lacerta trilineata* (n = 311).

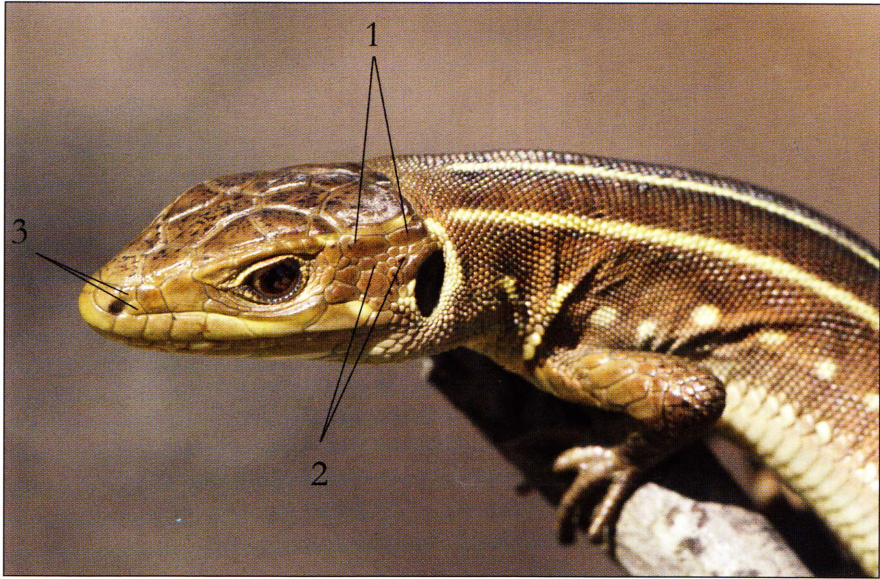
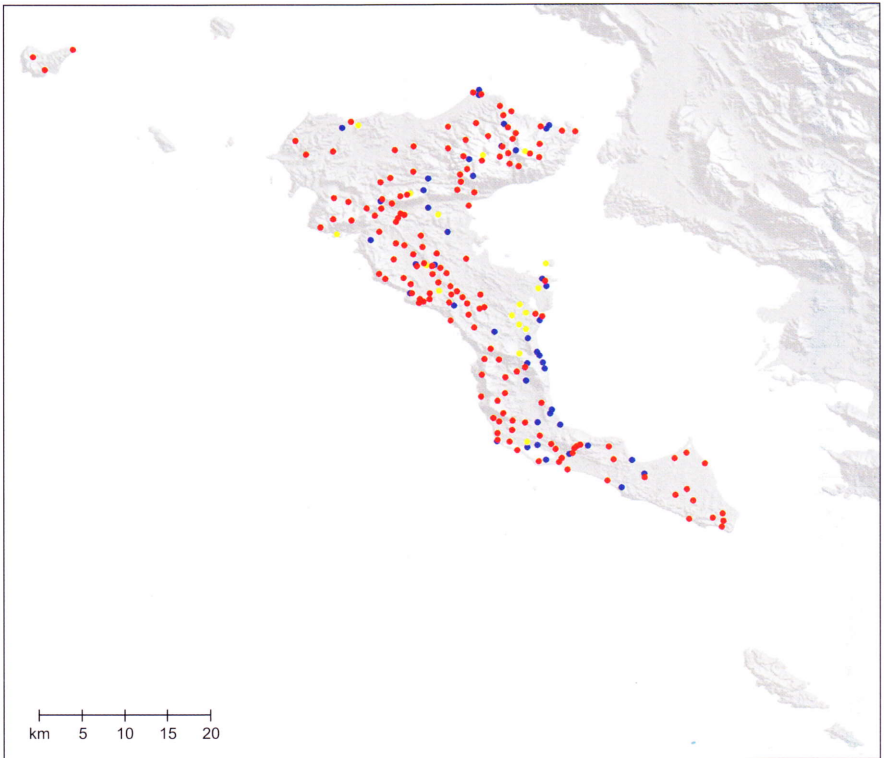


Fig. 224: Head of juvenile *Lacerta trilineata* showing paired postnasals (3) and large supratemporal (1) scales, separating *Lacerta* from *Podarcis*, and several supratemporal (2) scales, separating *Lacerta trilineata* from *Lacerta viridis* that usually has 12 or less.

with small dark vermiculate markings, especially on the head. Males sometimes have a blue throat, but if so it is always combined with yellow and not very pronounced. Subadults may be quite speckled and only have one lateral row of spots. Juveniles are usually yellowish brown or beige in colour with either three or five pale solid or dotted lines on the dorsum.

The largest adult male we have measured was 52 cm, but usually males have a total body length of 35–45 cm (SVL 12–15 cm) and a body mass of 40–80 grams. Females are smaller than males, normally around 35 cm. As with many lacertids the tail is long, comprising $\frac{2}{3}$ of the total body length. Size is never a good character when identifying species and since lacertids also tend to vary a lot in colour and pattern it may be necessary to check more specific characters. The uniformly green morph of the much smaller *Podarcis tauricus* could possibly be mistaken for any of the two *Lacerta* species. However, the small size of the supratemporal scales and the presence of only one postnasal scale normally key out as *Podarcis*, whereas larger supratemporals and two postnasals are typical for *Lacerta*. Also, *P. tauricus* never has a blue head. The Balkan green differs from *Lacerta viridis* in having more temporal scales (usually 20 or more, most of them small and close to the ear opening), a continuous row of supraciliary granules



Map 23: Localities for *Lacerta trilineata*.

(normally eight but difficult to see) and a rostral scale that reaches the nostril. It is often stated to have eight rows of ventral scales, but on Corfu both *L. trilineata* and *L. viridis* invariably have six rows.

The main activity period is late March to end of June, but adult specimens can be seen until November and juveniles can be observed throughout the year. Females are always more difficult to find than males, but there seems to be a tendency for higher female activity during the warmer months. *L. trilineata* is found all over Corfu and occurs in a range of open, rather dry and warm habitats, from phrygana to open woodland and olive groves.

It is an omnivorous species that feeds on fruit and invertebrates but also on larger prey such as smaller lizards and even young rodents. We have observed newly hatched lizards at the beginning of August when they are quite small with a total length of 10–12 cm. The species lays up to 20 eggs. The subspecies on the islands is *Lacerta trilineata major* BOULENGER, 1887.