

Acanthodactylus busacki SALVADOR, 1982

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Common names: Busack's Fringe-fingered Lizard (E), Acanthodactyle de Busack (F), Lagartija de El Aaiún (S).

Range: Nearly endemic to Morocco. DONAIRE *et al.* (2000) mentioned this species from the Tindouf area, Algeria, along road N50 near the Mauritanian border (27°14'N/8°25'W). However, the identification of this record remains to be confirmed.

Distribution in Morocco: Southwest of the country including the Atlantic Sahara: from the surroundings of Guelmim in the north to 67 km northeast of Dakhla (CROCHET *et al.* 2015). It enters inland at least 160 km from the Atlantic Ocean, along the lower Drâa Valley east of Assa. A record from Lahran, 50 km south of Mahbes Eskaikima (based on several individuals caught by J. CASTROVIEJO on 3 September 1965) needs to be verified. Members of the *Acanthodactylus pardalis* group were seen more in the south: at Entayat and in the Rio de Oro Peninsula (= Dakhla) (GÜNTHER 1903). They are indicated on the map with question marks.

Altitude: 0–580 m.

Identification: Medium-sized lizard usually larger than *Acanthodactylus maculatus*, sometimes exceeding 7 cm SVL (17 cm includ-



Fig. 448: Portrait of an adult male *Acanthodactylus busacki*. Tantan.

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ing the tail). Twelve longitudinal rows of ventral plates, dorsal scales small, slightly pointed but smooth. Subadults, young adult males and adult females have the typical *A. pardalis* pattern with six longitudinal rows of elongated light ocelli (four on the dorsum and one on each flank) and with dark (usually black) reticulation among them and sometimes with a red ventral tail colour (never seen by us in *A. maculatus*). In adults, particularly males, this reticulation tends to invade the dorsum and the longitudi-

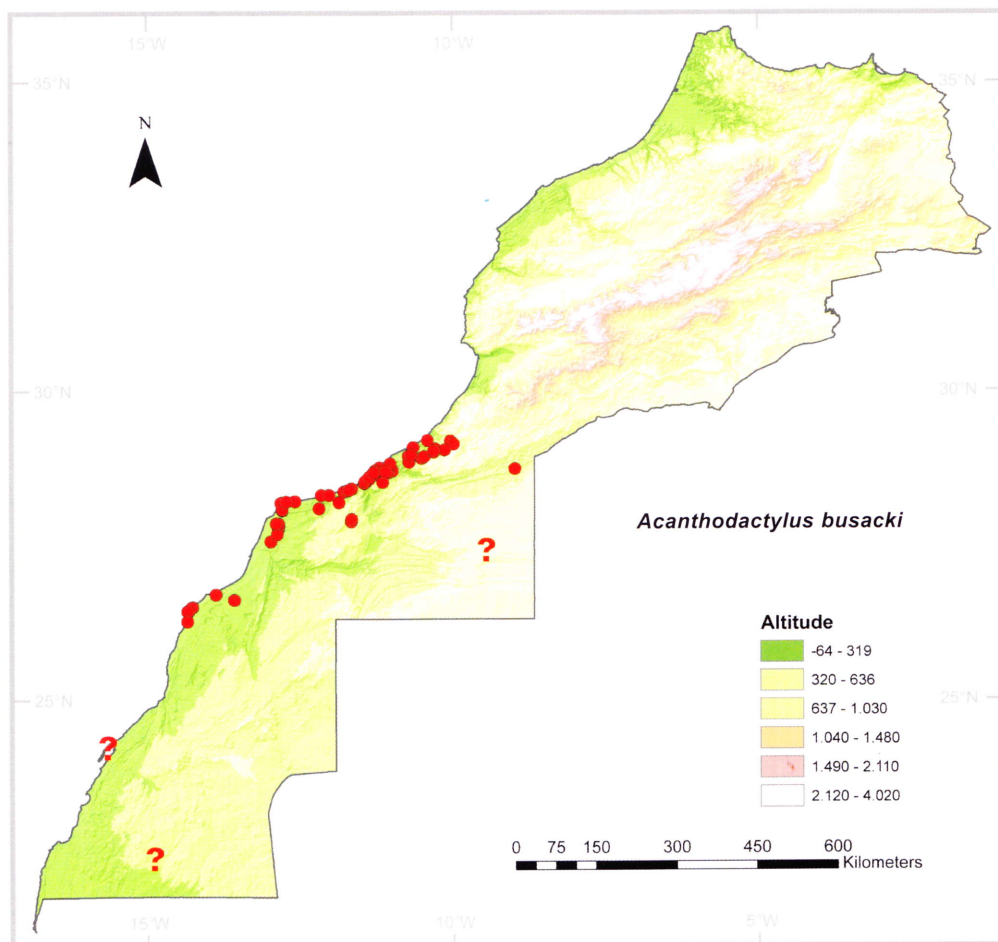




Fig. 449: *Acanthodactylus busacki*, adult male with regenerating tail. Boujdour.

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Fig. 450: Adult male of *Acanthodactylus busacki* from Boujdour.

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Fig. 451: *Acanthodactylus busacki*, adult female. Tantan.

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nally striped pattern disappears progressively. Adult males exhibit a unique colouration: the anterior parts, including the head, the throat, the nape and the anterior parts of the dorsum and the belly are reddish, turning progressively to yellowish on the posterior parts of the dorsum and the hind legs. Juveniles have a contrasting striped pattern with four longitudinal light lines on the dorsum and a series of aligned light ocelli on each flank. The tail is red in some individuals (or populations) resembling *A. erythrurus* which does not exist in the *A. busacki* range.

Habitat: Flat deserts and semi-deserts with silty soils, small stones or sand (but not in large dunes) and with scarce bushy vegetation including succulent euphorbias (*Euphorbia echinus*) where it is the sole species of fringe-toed lizard.

Biology: Like all *Acanthodactylus*, a diurnal lizard that spends much time basking and around bushes, moving quickly to capture prey and escape predators. Uses small holes in the sand, or bushes as refuge. Often found in sympatry with *A. aureus* and maybe with *A. boskianus*.

Remarks: The validity of the uniquely patterned *Acanthodactylus busacki* as a full species has also been confirmed by genetics. It is one of two species (with *A. margaritae*) in a deeply divergent clade within the *A. pardalis* complex (6.2 million years of divergence, according to TAMAR *et al.* 2016).