



Fig. 148: *Phoenicolacerta kulzeri*, Mt. Hermon.

Dror GALILI

Phoenicolacerta kulzeri (MÜLLER & WETTSTEIN, 1932)
Mt. Hermon lizard

Hebrew name: *Leta'a Hermonit* ("Mt. Hermon lizard")

Recent taxonomic changes: When first encountered, these lizards were thought to represent *Lacerta danfordi* (today *Anatololacerta danfordi*), and then *Lacerta kulzeri*. The genus *Lacerta* was split in 2007 into multiple genera, placing *kulzeri* (and *laevis*) in the newly erected genus *Phoenicolacerta*, named for its distribution along the Eastern Mediterranean. While often difficult to distinguish from *Phoenicolacerta laevis*, which inhabits lower elevations on the Hermon and elsewhere, genetically the two species are highly distinct.

Size: Up to 223 mm total length, SVL 28–70 mm; weight 0.5–12 g.

Description: A brown and olive green lizard resembling *P. laevis*. It has a black stripe on each side of the body. The underside is gray or whitish, and not greenish or turquoise. The tail is at least twice as long as the body and is very detachable. The male is larger than the female.

Similar species: *Phoenicolacerta laevis* (p. 190) ventral is greenish or bluish; *P. kulzeri* is somewhat smaller, more dotted and less colorful than *P. laevis*. *Phoenicolacerta kulzeri* is only found above 1,500 m on the Hermon, whereas *P. laevis* is limited to lower elevations.

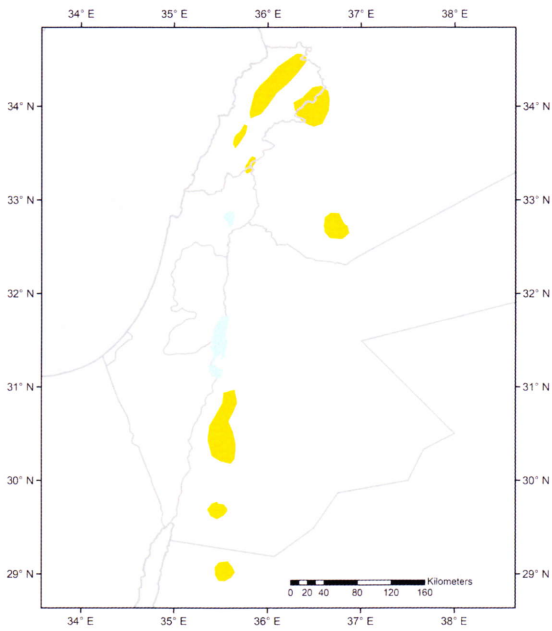
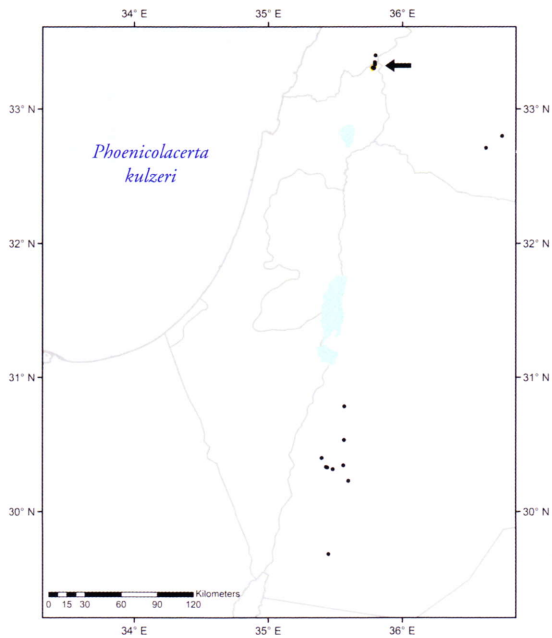




Fig. 149: *Phoenicolacerta kulzeri*, Mt. Hermon.

Roy TALBI

Natural history and behavior: A diurnal, mostly ground-dwelling, inhabitant of rocky areas in the higher parts of the Hermon Mountain where it is quite common. When fleeing it runs to the nearest shelter, unlike the Lebanon lizard that flees longer distances. Its diet consists of arthropods, which it hunts by active foraging. During summer, females produce multiple clutches of 3–8 eggs.

Distribution in Israel: Mt. Hermon, 1,500 m above sea level and higher.

World distribution: Isolated mountain populations in Lebanon, southwestern Syria and western Jordan, and northwestern Saudi Arabia.

Conservation: IUCN Status: In Israel: Critically Endangered (B); Global: Endangered (B2ab(iii); decreasing populations). This species has a small and highly fragmented range in mountaintops from Syria to northern Saudi Arabia, potentially a relic of a continuous population during the ice ages. As with other high mountain endemics, climate change is a real threat to this species. With altitudinal habitats projected to move further upwards on the Hermon, the range of the species will contract. Development for tourism and military purposes is also harming it on the Hermon.