

A male *Podarcis sicula*, captured in Sorrento, which belongs to the southern subspecies *Campestris*.



TWO WALL LIZARDS FROM ITALY

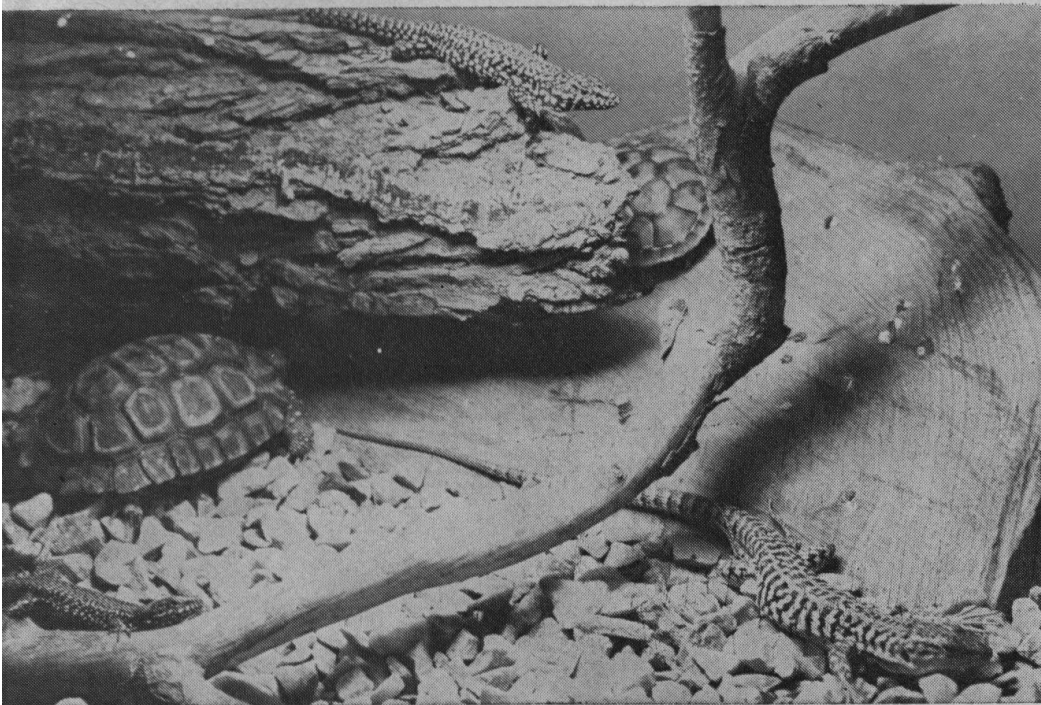
Written & Illustrated by Chris Mattison

CERTAIN small lively lizards are a characteristic feature of the reptile fauna of Southern Europe. Many of them are brightly marked in green, black, and occasionally blue, and as a group they are popularly known as Wall Lizards. Although they are correctly referred to by the generic name *Podarcis*, many text books still refer to them under the older name of *Lacerta*, a name which is now reserved for a small number of the species which were formerly regarded as one large genus. The Italian peninsular is inhabited by two of the most handsome species, *Podarcis muralis*, and *Podarcis sicula*.

The former is also found in France, parts of Spain, etc., and has a number of sub-species, many of which are restricted to isolated groups of islands. The back is usually a varying shade of green, overmarked with a network of black, which colour also predominates on the head and flanks (see fig. 1). The underparts can be white, pale yellow, or brick-red, often edged along the flanks with a row of blue scales, these being more obvious in males. These lizards are active during the hottest part of the day and are often to be seen basking on walls, piles of logs, and along roadsides, dis-

appearing at incredible speed if approached too closely. Females in my collection laid clutches of four and five eggs during May and June, which took from forty-one to forty-five days to hatch. The young, which measure about two inches in total length compared with the eight to ten inches of the adults lack the green coloration, and feed on the smallest insects, such as aphids, small maggots and grubs, etc.

The other Wall Lizard of Italy, *P. sicula*, is sometimes known as the Ruin Lizard, and if anything it is even more colourful, and more agile. The grass-green back only has black markings along the central strip, and the flanks are barred, rather than mottled, with black (see fig. 2). The blue scales often extend to the bases of the fore-limbs in adult males, particularly in the breeding season. This species is slightly larger than *P. muralis*, males sometimes reaching almost twelve inches in total length, of which about two-thirds is tail, and is more heavily built. Like *P. muralis*, the Ruin Lizard is a sun-lover, and can be seen in enormous numbers in suitable habitats, which include walls, the edges of paths, and old buildings. Anyone who has visited the Roman ruins at Pompeii on a hot



Left: A section of the author's vivarium which contains several wall lizards, geckos and young tortoises.

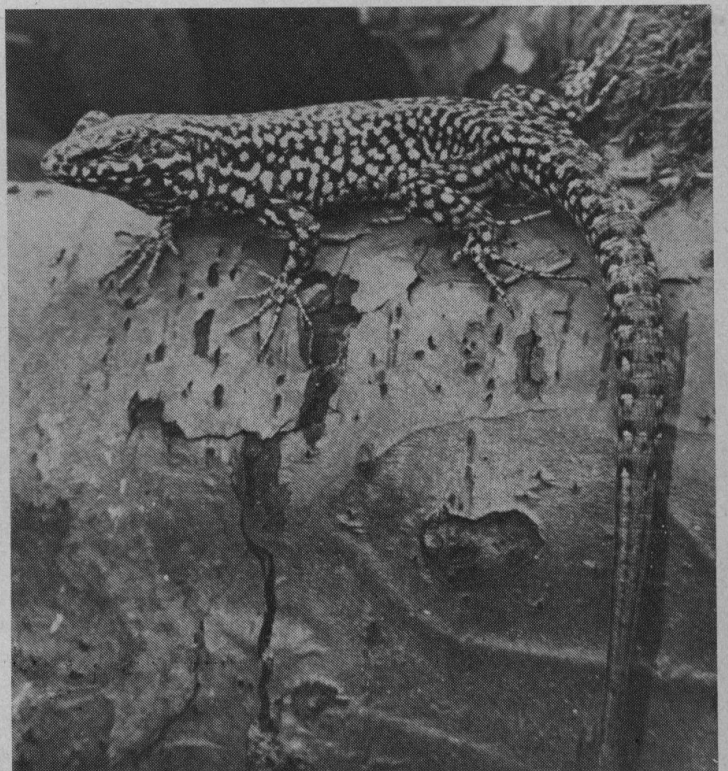
Below: A male *Podarcis muralis*, from Pisa, of the subspecies *brueggmanni* which is common all throughout Tuscany.

summers day can hardly have failed to notice the hundreds of lizards on the ancient walls, and in particular on the tiers of the amphitheatre, and these will have been Ruin Lizards of the sub-species *campestris*, which inhabits Yugoslavia.

Capturing either of these species can be very difficult—I found that a small running noose attached to the end of a thin pole was the most successful although I still only managed to secure a very small percentage of the individuals seen. However, both species are frequently imported, and distributed through the pet trade, and although there is no doubt that they make excellent vivarium exhibits when in good condition, certain factors should be borne in mind when considering their accommodation and subsequent maintenance. Because these lizards are diurnal, and rely on the sun's rays to bring their body temperature up to the required level, facilities for basking in the sun or a suitable substitute are essential. In my experience, a normal light bulb with a reflector is satisfactory provided that it is of sufficient strength. A temperature of 100 degrees F. immediately beneath the bulb should be aimed at, and suitable basking sites in the form of logs, rocks, etc., provided in this area. In order that the lizards can retreat from the heat source once their body temperature is raised sufficiently, it is a good idea to use a rectangular vivarium (a 36 × 15 × 12 aquarium is ideal for a small group), with the light fitting situated near one end in order to give a thermal gradient whereby the lizards can maintain their correct body temperature by shuffling from hot to cool areas at will, as they do in their natural surroundings. Substrate can be sand, gravel, etc., and plenty of hiding places should be provided as they like to have a secure retreat when the light goes out at night.

Food consists of any small insects or grubs, such as grasshoppers, mealworms, maggots, flies, etc., but the keyword is variety. Unless the lizards are exposed to uninterrupted sunlight they will benefit from an occasional supplement of vitamins which can be sprinkled on their food, or, preferably, dropped into their water, which should be renewed daily.

When considering communities of these species it is essential that only one male of each is included as they are strongly territorial, and a second male will quickly be persecuted, and eventually killed if unable to escape, as in the confines of a vivarium. Several



females will, however, live peaceably with one male, although the latter will undoubtedly command the most favourable basking and hiding positions. The males are instantly recognisable as being more colourful, larger, and more robust in appearance, especially in the neck and head region. As a guide to numbers, my own vivarium, measuring 30×15×12 high, contains four *P. muralis*, two *P. sicala*, including a male of each, a Wall Lizard of another species, three young Geckos, and two hatchling tortoises. A hollow log provides an abundance of hiding places, and succulent plants, in well-hidden pots give a natural appearance to the set-up. During the egg-laying

season the females dug into the soil in these pots to deposit their eggs and they were then covered with a polythene bag and removed to a warm room for the eggs to incubate. The soil was lightly watered when necessary, and the polythene bags prevented too much evaporation, as well as confining the young lizards as they hatched and emerged from the soil.

A final word of warning for intending Wall Lizard collectors and keepers—like their British relatives, both of these species part with their tails readily when held by them, and although these can be regenerated the subsequent replacements are but pale imitations of the originals.



Pseudotropheus zebra

Written & illustrated by Jack Hems

THERE are at least 200 different species of cichlid fishes found in Lake Malawi (Nyasa). *Pseudotropheus zebra* is one of the smaller species which occurs naturally there and nowhere else and is becoming increasingly popular as an aquarium inmate. It is widespread in this vast inland lake in a variety of races and colour forms which include white, pinkish, yellow, orange and blue. In some forms the colours of the two sexes are very dissimilar. Therefore it is easy to understand why differences in coloration between males and females of the same species led, and will presumably lead for a time, to some con-

fusion and mixtakes in identification.

Although vertical dark bars adorn the sides of the blue form, in general the other colour forms show only a suspicion, or absence, of vertical markings. They do, however, display some dark irregular blotchings. For all that, the colours of the males are always brighter during courtship and breeding.

The best-known colour form of *P. zebra* is blue: a medium to greyish blue. Adorning this visually pleasing ground are seven or more darker blue bars that extend from the lower part of the long-based dorsal fin to the belly. The anal fin of the male, and