

*Podarcis tauricus* (PALLAS, 1814)

Balkan wall lizard (Lacertidae)

The Balkan wall lizard is found throughout Corfu and is surprisingly abundant on the small islet of Lazaretto with one of the densest populations observed. In 1929 it was also reported from the nearby Vido, where *Algyroides nigropunctatus* is common, but despite several visits we have not been able to find it. Given the present type of habitats on this islet and the fact that *P. tauricus* is adapted to open areas and grassland and is easy to observe during its two main activity periods it is most unlikely that the islet presently holds a population. Vido is a conservation area with no cats or dogs, but it has plenty of introduced rabbits and pheasants. The islet has unfortunately been planted with Aleppo pines and large parts are not suitable for reptiles other than tolerant species such as *A. nigropunctatus* and *Hemidactylus turcicus*. In addition to *P. tauricus*, *Lacerta trilineata* and *Malpolon insignitus* were also reported from Vido in 1929. All three species may have been present earlier when the islet was used for grazing and much more open, but today they seem to be absent.

*P. tauricus* is a typical terrestrial species found in open areas and as most lacertids it is very fast. It also has a very peculiar way of running, making 90 degree turns in order to avoid predators such as *Dolichophis caspius* with which it often co-occurs. In contrast to *Lacerta viridis*, *Podarcis muralis* and *A. nigropunctatus* it is not a climber. The



Fig. 209: Male *Podarcis tauricus ionicus* from southern Corfu.



Fig. 210: Spotted *Podarcis tauricus ionicus* with almost no green colour from the small islets of Lazaretto.



Fig. 211: *Podarcis tauricus ionicus* from Lazaretto.



Fig. 212: A striking green morph of *Podarcis tauricus ionicus* from southern Corfu that could possibly be mistaken for *Lacerta viridis*.



Fig. 213: Female *Podarcis tauricus ionicus* from northern Corfu.



Fig. 214: *Podarcis tauricus ionicus* from Corfu town in early June.



Fig. 215: Male *Podarcis tauricus ionicus* from central Corfu.



Fig. 216: Head of a green morph male *Podarcis tauricus* showing small supratemporal (1) and single postnasal (2) scales typical of the species of *Podarcis*, separating them from *Lacerta*.

species has a relatively short head but the overall size is about the same as for *P. muralis* and *A. nigropunctatus* with a total length of 17–20 cm, females being slightly smaller than males. The tail is 65–70 % of the total length and the body mass is 4–8 grams. It is a very polymorphic species with colour variation not only between but also within populations, ranging from beige and green with dark spots to almost uniformly green, sometimes with blue spots on the sides and shoulders.

Even within the population on Lazaretto, an islet of only about seven hectares, there is a surprising degree of variation, as is the case with specimens from the town of Corfu, some of which are different from those of any other population. The Balkan wall lizard is known to show seasonal as well as habitat colour variation being greener in spring and turning brown during the dry months, or being browner in dry habitats. However, this is not evident on the green island of Corfu where the lizards are very rarely seen during the dry summer months. The highest frequency of non-green morphs can be found in the populations of Corfu town and the islet of Lazaretto, but whether or not this frequency changes with the seasons needs to be further investigated.

The more or less completely green morph, which occurs in several populations and is common in some localities around Korission, may in some cases have been misidentified as *Lacerta viridis*, a species with markedly different habitat preferences.

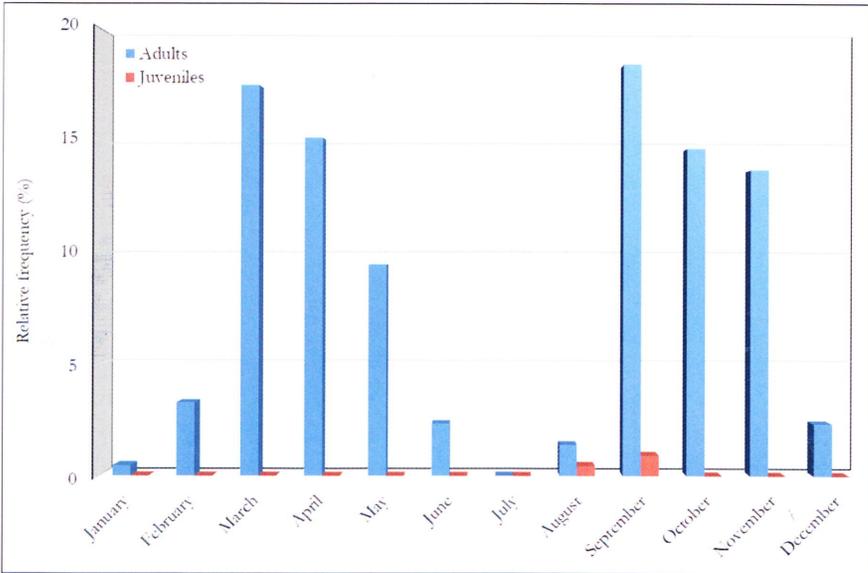
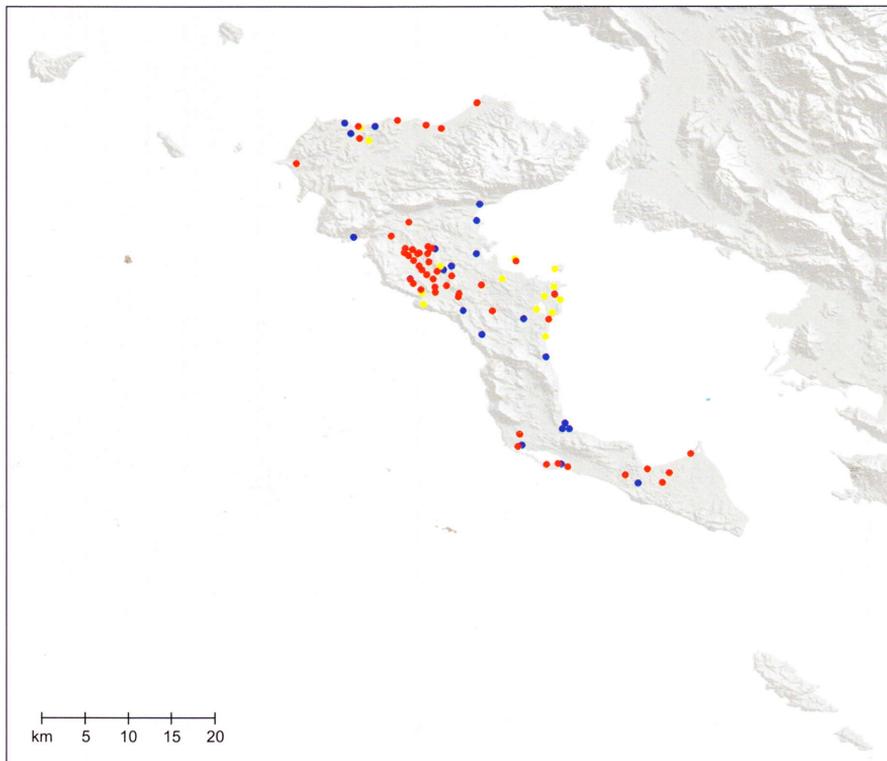


Fig. 217: Relative monthly observation frequency (%) for *Podarcis tauricus* (n = 212+).

Very high population densities of *P. tauricus* have previously been reported from Corfu, ranging from 180–350 individuals per hectare. We have not found such high population densities anywhere, the highest we have estimated is the one on Lazaretto that is about 50 per hectare and in most, if not all, other populations the value is about the same or even lower. The question is if the situation for this species has become less favourable over the past 30 years due to less available open habitats, increase in shrub lands and extensive spraying with pesticides during the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Balkan wall lizard has a bimodal daily and seasonal activity pattern, avoiding higher temperatures. It becomes active already in February–March, almost disappears during the summer and then has a second activity peak during September–October, still being active in November. During the warmer months of the activity periods it is usually found between 10–12 hrs in the morning and 16–18 hrs in the afternoon. The species frequents open areas such as e.g. meadows in open olive groves and pastures. On Lazaretto it occurs in a rather atypical habitat close to the shore, utilizing stones rather than low vegetation for cover and around Korission it can be seen foraging in and around the dune pools.



Map 22: Localities for *Podarcis tauricus*.

*P. tauricus* feeds on a variety of invertebrates, particularly grasshoppers and bush crickets. It lays up to ten eggs that hatch in 8–9 weeks. The subspecies in the area is *Podarcis tauricus ionicus* (LEHRS, 1902) and the terra typica (restricted) is Corfu. The species was previously placed in the genus *Lacerta* as *L. taurica*.