

land, foothill and, in part, in the mountain areas, approximately in the same habitats frequented by Sand Lizards. In the contact zone of these two species, one dominates in numbers over the other. Locally, Caspian Green Lizards form dense populations. They climb into shrubs and trees, may dive into water and stay submerged for 1.5–2 minutes. Their burrows dug in soft soil are 50–70 cm long. The activity of this species is diurnal; in summer, in open biotopes, there are two peaks of activity. Caspian Green Lizards have individual territories of about 200–300 m<sup>2</sup>. In spring, they emerge from hibernation between mid-March and mid-April, and leave again for overwintering in October or November; during warm winters, they may remain active to February. Specimens hibernate in their own holes or those of burrowing mammals. In lowland Dagestan, most females produce two clutches per season: in the surroundings of Makhachkala, clutches usually contain 4–8 eggs, in South Dagestan 6–10 eggs. The incubation period lasts about two months. In Dagestan, hatchlings with body lengths of 3.3–3.4 cm have been observed from the second half of July, although the majority appears in the second half of August. Females reach sexual maturity in their second year of life, at a minimum body length of 6.5–7 cm. This species has a lifespan of five years. Various insects and their larvae, primarily beetles, as well as spiders, molluscs, blackberries, and raspberries, have been recorded in its diet. Cannibalism is a rare occurrence in Caspian Green Lizards.

**Conservation status:** Populations are stable and in no need of any conservation measures throughout the species' range.

### Genus *Ophisops* MÉNÉTRIES, 1832 Snake-eyed lizards

Small, slender lizards growing to just over 6 cm in body length. The tail is about twice as long as the trunk. Males reach slightly larger sizes than females. Snake-eyed lizards have transparent lower eyelids that are completely or partially fused with the upper lids to form a spectacle over the eye, like in snakes, hence their common name. However, the fused eyelids have not lost their mobility, and lizards can blink in which the transparent circle moves down the eyeball. The top and sides of the head have longitudinal grooves.

The nostril is located between 2–4 nasal scales, it does not touch the supralabial and does not rise high on the head. The frontal scale is significantly narrowed in its middle part. Large scales of the collar are visible only on the sides of the throat.



Map 72: *Ophisops elegans*.

The dorsal scales of snake-eyed lizards are pointed, distinctly keeled and imbricate. The ventrals are large, smooth, and arranged in regular longitudinal and transverse rows. Femoral pores are well developed.

Hatchlings and juveniles are brightly coloured with contrasting patterns but become duller as they mature.

Snake-eyed lizards are inhabitants of stony and clayey semi-deserts and are active even in the hottest hours. Females lay eggs, and can produce more than one clutch per season.

Snake-eyed lizards are common from North Africa and south-east Europe eastwards to western Pakistan and central India.

The genus includes 11 species of which one lives in the territory of the former USSR and Russia.

### Elegant Snake-eyed Lizard

*Ophisops elegans* MÉNÉTRIES, 1832

Figs. 351–354, Map 72

The generic and common names of the species refer to its snake-like eyes covered with a transparent "spectacle" or "brille."

**External appearance:** The Elegant Snake-eyed Lizard has a body length up to 6.2 cm, and a tail of up to 11.4 cm. The upper surface of the head has a distinct longitudinal groove.

The frontal shield is significantly narrowed in its middle part. The masseteric shield is absent. Snake-eyed Lizards do not have separate eyelids; they are fused as in snakes. The dorsal scales are imbricate, with sharp keels. The ventral shields are large, smooth, and arranged in regular longitudinal and transverse rows. There is one large shield in the pre-cloacal area.

Adult Snake-eyed Lizards are greenish-grey or olive-brownish above; the sides are gingery-yellow or reddish-orange with dark spots and speckles. Young lizards are characterized by a bright, contrasting pattern of four white stripes on a black background. The longitudinally striped pattern of young lizards may more or less persist in adult specimens. The venter is white, with no pattern.

**Distinguishing features:** The Snake-eyed Lizard differs from other lizards living near its species range by the transparent "spectacle" of the lower eyelid and imbricate, strongly keeled scales.

**Distribution and subspecies:** The Snake-eyed Lizard is common in the north-east of the Balkan Peninsula, Asia Minor and western Asia in the west, southwards to the Sinai Peninsula, eastwards to Pakistan and north-western India. Within the limits of the former USSR, it lives in Transcaucasia.

In Russia, the Snake-eyed Lizard was recently found in south Dagestan. There may be an isolated population in the foothills of Chechnya, in the surroundings of the village of Ishcherskaya.

Over the years, eight subspecies have been described, of which two are unanimously recognized: the nominative one, *O. e. elegans* MÉNÉTRIES, 1832, and *O. e. ehrenbergi* (WIEGMANN, 1835). In Transcaucasia and Russia, only the first one is present.

**Natural history:** The Snake-eyed Lizard lives in stony and clayey semi-deserts and dry steppes, on clayey-gravelly slopes with xerophile vegetation. In the foothills, it is found in juniper, open





Figs. 351–352: Variation in dorsal colour and pattern in the elegant Snake-eyed Lizard, *Ophisops elegans*. Both individuals are from Dagestan.  
L. MAZANAIEVA (left), E. DUNAYEV (right)

forests, among prickly bushes and grasses on gentle slopes, and it settles in vineyards and gardens. In the mountains, its altitudinal range extends to 1,800 m a.s.l. In Southern Dagestan, the species occurs in a clayey-stony semi-desert at an elevation of 148 m a.s.l., on slopes covered with saltwort saplings and other plants, as well as rocks. It shares its habitat with Mediterranean Tortoises and Levantine Vipers, while the foot of the slopes is frequented by Long-legged Skinks and Rapid Fringe-toed Lizards. While walking in this habitat at the end of May or mid-June, one can observe five to six Elegant Snake-eyed Lizards along 1 km of pathway.

*Ophisops elegans* is a diurnal species that remains active even during the hottest days when air temperatures reach +35 °C and other lizards retreat into the shade. It shelters in gaps between stones and abandoned animal burrows during the summer and in winter. This lizard is fond of thick, prickly plants, hiding and blending in at their base. After hibernation, it appears in late February or early March, and leaves again for overwintering in late October or mid-November.

During the breeding season, females produce two clutches of 3–6 eggs, the first one in May, the second one within the following month. The number of eggs per clutch depends on the size of the female. The young hatch between mid-July and late August or mid-September at a body length of 2.1–2.4 cm. They become sexually mature after their second winter. The mating display of snake-eyed lizards consists of head nodding at different the intervals according to sex. Two or three noddings are enough for the lizards to recognize their opponent: if both are males, they quickly part ways. When the other is a female, it runs away, but the male catches her up and grabs her by the tail.

At short distances, these lizards are capable of running on two legs, balancing with their tail. The main diet of this species is made of spiders and various insects, which they often catch mid-flight.

**Conservation status:**

The Elegant Snake-eyed Lizard is included in the Red Data Book of Dagestan.



Figs. 353–354: Close-up views of Elegant Snake-eyed Lizards showing head scalation and the transparent spectacle covering the eyes.  
E. DUNAYEV