

Acanthodactylus scutellatus (AUDOUIN, 1827)
Nidua fringe-fingered lizard

Hebrew name: *Shnunit Holot* (“sands fringe-fingered lizard”)

Recent taxonomic changes: None. The Egyptian fringe-fingered lizard was considered conspecific with this species in the past (adults of the much smaller *A. aegyptia* were considered juvenile *A. scutellatus*). Reports from the Arabian Peninsula represent *A. hardyi*.
Size: Up to 210 mm total length, SVL 24–73 mm; weight 0.5–9.5 g. Males grow larger than females.

Description: The body is yellowish brown, and the back is covered with small black spots that fade in the hotter hours. White spots occasionally appear among the black ones. The young have a blue tail. The tail is detachable.

Similar species: *Acanthodactylus aegyptius* (p. 152) is very similar, but has a Y-shaped patch at base of tail, whereas young *A. scutellatus* have a bluish tail. *Acanthodactylus aegyptius* reaches a smaller size and is more slender but juvenile *A. scutellatus* may be mistaken for adult *A. aegyptius*.



Fig. 134: *Acanthodactylus scutellatus*, northern Negev.

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Fig. 135: *Acanthodactylus scutellatus*, northern Negev.

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Fig. 136: *Acanthodactylus scutellatus*, juvenile, northern Negev.

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Fig. 137: *Acanthodactylus scutellatus*, eating a grasshopper, northern Negev.

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Natural history and behavior: Inhabits solid and semi-stabilized sands. Activity occurs on the ground during the morning and early evening. There is a partial temporal and spatial separation of activities between the *Nidua* and Egyptian fringe-fingered lizards: the former is active in cooler hours and in solid, vegetation-rich sands. Its diet consists of small arthropods. One to four clutches of eggs, each containing 1–5 eggs, are laid around May–July, in a nest that the female digs. The young appear as early as June. Most individuals survive only a single breeding season.

Distribution in Israel: Northwestern Negev and the coastal sand dunes, as far north as Rishon LeZion, in the past ranged further north (at least to the latitude of Kefar Shemaryahu).

World distribution: North Africa from Mauritania and Morocco, through most of the Sahara and Sahel to North Sudan, Egypt, and Israel.

Conservation: IUCN Status: In Israel: Near Threatened; Global: Not Evaluated. Like most *Acanthodactylus* species *A. scutellatus* is abundant and conspicuous in regions it inhabits. However, it is endemic to sands and thus, in Israel, has a highly threatened habitat that suffers from many threats, deriving from habitat loss to agriculture, solar farms and, in the coastal plain, to rapid urbanization pressures and encroachment of Mediterranean fauna and flora into the sand dunes it inhabits. It is likewise threatened by off-roading activity, sand mining, etc., and we view it as threatened overall. Like all reptiles and amphibians its status in Israel requires an update.

