

Mesalina babaeldini SEGOLI, COHEN & WERNER, 2002
(formerly *M. guttulata*)
Small-spotted lizard

Hebrew name: *Midbarit Eionit* (“eye-spotted desert lizard”)

Recent taxonomic changes: Until recently classified as *M. guttulata*, but recent taxonomic and molecular data indicate that ‘true’ *M. guttulata* are restricted to North Africa, while *M. babaeldini*, initially described as a Sinai endemic, is now thought to be the species inhabiting Israel.

Size: Up to 160 mm total length, SVL 17–58 mm; weight 0.2–4 g.

Description: Color is brown to gray, and the back is covered with scattered wide spots surrounded by dark spots, making them appear eye-like. The tail is twice as long as the body, decorated with alternating dark and light rings, and detachable. The young have a blue tail.

Similar species: *Mesalina olivieri* (p. 181). The dorsal pattern of *M. olivieri* contains dark color patches forming near-continuous lines whereas in *M. guttulata* there is no clear striped pattern and no black coloring; *Mesalina babaeldini* is found on harder soils and *M. olivieri* on sandy soils.



Fig. 141: *Mesalina babaeldini*, Judean desert.

Aviad BAR

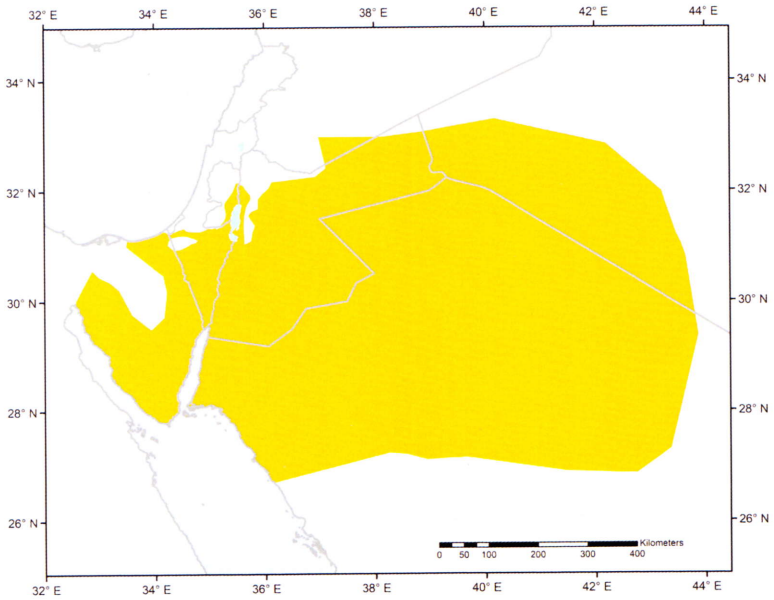
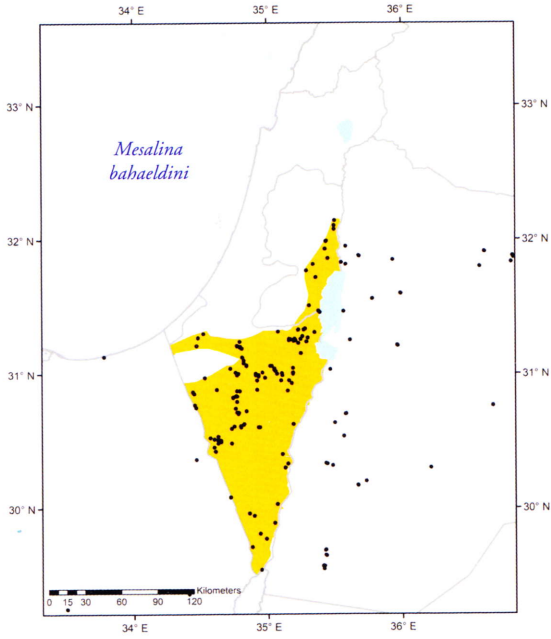








Fig. 143: *Mesalina babaeldini*, northern Negev.

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Natural history and behavior: A very common lizard found in desert habitats with hard, often rock-covered soils and sparse vegetation. Smaller and slower than the sympatric fringe-footed lizards. Activity occurs on the ground during the morning and afternoon. When inactive it mostly hides under rocks or in burrows abandoned by other animals. Its diet consists of small arthropods, including scorpions. During the mating season one or two clutches are laid, each containing 1–7 (average ~4) eggs, which hatch after 1.5 months. The young appear as early as July and most survive through only a single breeding season.

Distribution in Israel: Found in high densities in the Negev, the Judean desert, the Dead Sea Valley, and the Arava.

World distribution: Southwestern Syria, much of Jordan, northwestern Saudi Arabia, Sinai, and Israel. Possibly in western Iraq. Populations from northeastern Arabia probably belong to an as-yet unnamed species, while those from Africa are *M. guttulata*.

Conservation: IUCN Status: In Israel: Least Concern; Global: Least Concern (stable populations). Although these assessments date from 2004 and 2006, respectively, and were made under a very different species concept (the global analysis involved populations from as far west as the western Sahara), this lizard is one of the most common of all desert species in Israel, inhabiting relatively intact habitats, and probably doing well within Israel and globally.

◁ Fig. 142: *Mesalina babaeldini*, Judean desert.

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