

Podarcis muralis (LAURENTI, 1768)

Common wall lizard (Lacertidae)

The first reported observation of wall lizards in Corfu was made in 2003 in a small area below the New Fortress in the city of Corfu, but it may have been observed already in 1993. The small area in question is a square close to the harbour, surrounded by roads and buildings on three sides and it is very busy during the tourist season. These often anthropophilic lizards inhabit the trees around the square but have never been observed outside this area despite the fact that there are more suitable habitats within a 100 m, i.e. the extensive walls and vegetation of the fortress itself. Originally some 30 specimens were observed, but we have never seen more than 10 at any one time but all in good condition. This very unlikely place, which has also been subject to recent structural changes, seems to have been able to support a small breeding population during the last 12 or perhaps even 22 years. This is remarkable in itself, but even more so considering that there are an additional two lizard species utilising the same area and the same trees, *Algyroides nigropunctatus* and *Laudakia stellio*, both competitors to the wall lizard and the latter also a potential predator. These species are rather common and frequently also found on the walls of the fortress. *Lacerta tri-lineata* is present within the fortress area, but it is less common and not found in the square.



Fig. 205: *Podarcis muralis* is only found in a small area in Corfu town.



Fig. 206: *Podarcis muralis* has almost no striking colours, not even during the mating season (Corfu town, early May).



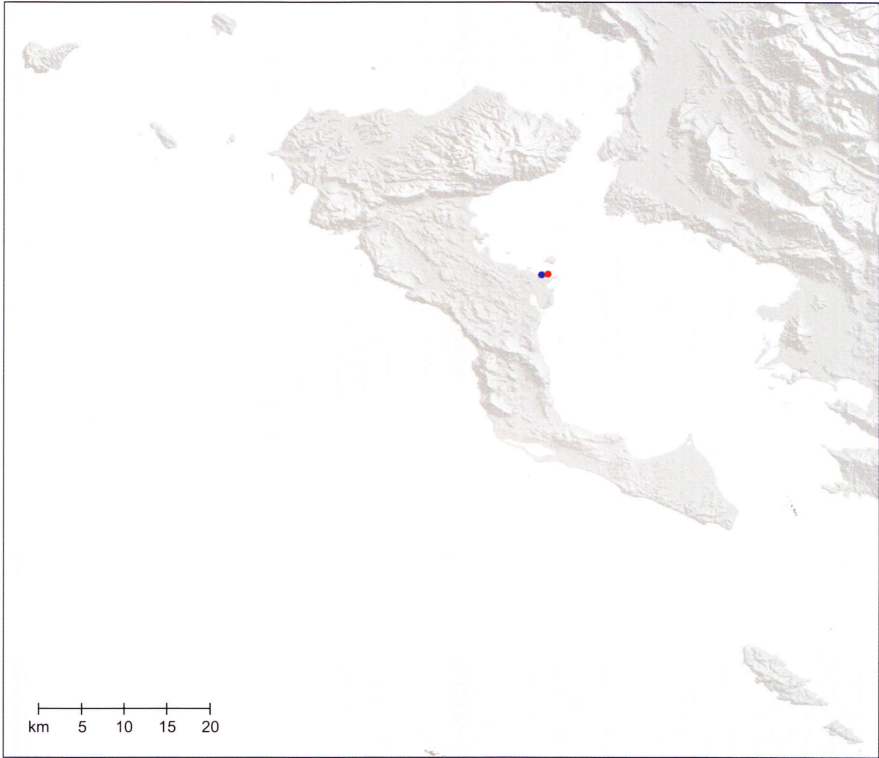
Fig. 207: *Podarcis muralis*.



Fig. 208: Large *Podarcis muralis* male with unusual pattern.

It has been suggested that *P. muralis* also may occur along the Corfu coast further north but there is no documentation to support this. The species can locally reach high densities, but the population on Corfu is very small and may consist of as few as 20 adult individuals only. The Common wall lizard is a small species, reaching a total length of about 20 cm with the tail making up about 2/3. The body is rather flat and the colour is usually light brown with white markings, especially on the chin and lips, something that is characteristic for this species. There are no green or blue colours and the males are similar to but slightly larger than the females. This species can be distinguished from *A. nigropunctatus* by lacking distinctly keeled dorsal scales and usually at least some blue colouring of the chin, and from *Podarcis tauricus* by entirely lacking green colours.

We have observed wall lizards from February to November, but they may well be active on warm days even during the coldest months. It is a cold tolerant lizard and in the south of its distribution it is more of a mountain species and not usually found in the lowlands and Corfu is a rather unusual place for it. In general, it prefers dry sunny habitats, but in the south parts of its distribution it can be found in more shaded places. This good climber is predominantly found on walls and in trees. The Common wall lizard feeds on a variety of small invertebrates. Males are territorial and especially during the breeding season they may be involved in tough fights, chasing and biting



Map 21: Localities for *Podarcis muralis*.

each other. The species can lay several clutches with up to 12 eggs that hatch after 2–3 months. As with *Podarcis* species in general the Common wall lizard was placed in the genus *Lacerta* for a long time. The subspecies found on Corfu is considered to be *Podarcis muralis albanica* (BOLKAY, 1919).