



Fig. 435: *Acanthodactylus aureus*, adult male. Dahkla.

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Fig. 436: *Acanthodactylus aureus*, adult female. Echatea El Abied.

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*Acanthodactylus aureus* GÜNTHER, 1903

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**Common names:** Golden Fringe-fingered Lizard (E), *Acanthodactyle doré* (F), *Lagartija dorada* (S).

**Range:** Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal.

**Distribution in Morocco:** *Acanthodactylus aureus* occupies a vast coastal area from Agadir in the north to the Atlantic Sahara in the south, penetrating inland over 100 km, depending on the regions. Most inland populations are recorded from near Smara, and just north of Adrar Souttouff (VELO-ANTON *et al.* 2018).

**Altitude:** 0–350 m.

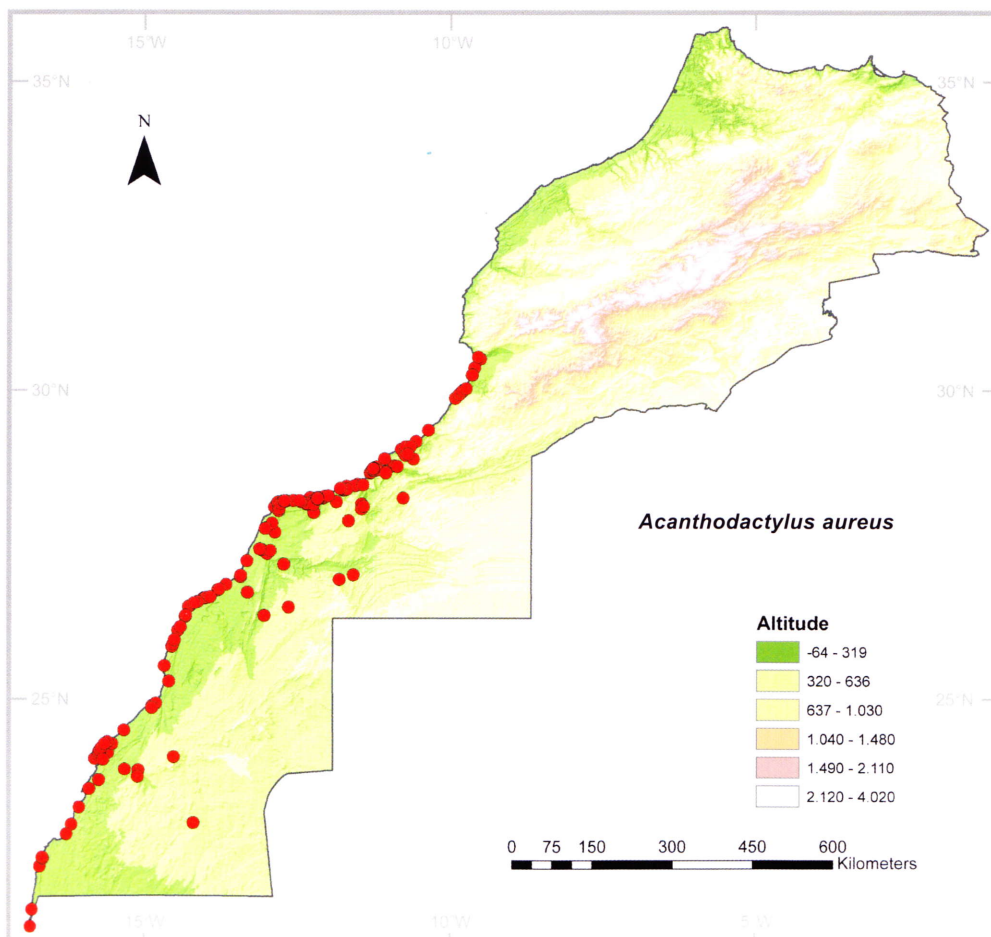
**Identification:** A medium-sized lizard (reaching 5.5 cm SVL and around 17 cm total length). The snout is very pointed, front slightly concave. Fourth and fifth supralabials fused, very long, reaching behind the middle of the subocular. Dorsal scales vary in size according to population, they are either equal in size on the dorsum and on the flanks or larger on the back. Sandy-cream colouration with scarcely contrasting blotches and stripes in adults. Along the dorsum, especially in subadults and females, four to six longitudinal light stripes with dark maculations on these stripes delimiting a series of quadrangular spots. This pattern is characteristic to *A. aureus* and another species belonging



Fig. 437: Portrait of an *Acanthodactylus aureus* from El Argoub.

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to the same group, *A. taghitensis* (yet to be recorded in Morocco). The other members of the *Acanthodactylus scutellatus* complex have different dorsal patterns even as subadults or females. Males in breeding attire have no stripes, but are reticulated on a golden yellow ground. Juveniles have a more contrasting dorsal pattern and a blue tail.





◁ Fig. 438: Cloacal region of an adult male *Acanthodactylus aureus*. The noticeable ventral bulges in the proximal tail are produced by the hemipenes. Dahkla. G. MARTÍNEZ DEL MÁRMOL

**Habitat:** Mainly restricted to sandy areas with sparse vegetation.

**Biology:** A diurnal species, *A. aureus* spends much time basking and moving quickly around bushes to capture prey and escape predators. Uses small holes in the sand as a refuge. In habitats with dense vegetation or without much sand near the coast, it is replaced by *A. busacki* or *A. boskianus*.

**Remarks:** *Acanthodactylus aureus* is a member of the *A. scutellatus* group forming an old subclade with *A. taghitensis* (14.6 million years divergence from all other species of *Acanthodactylus*).



Fig. 439: *Acanthodactylus aureus*, juvenile. Tarfaya.

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