

## CANARY ISLAND LIZARDS &amp; SAND RACERS

The Gallotiinae is a small subfamily of the Lacertidae (Old World lizards) containing just two genera and 14 species distributed across northwest Africa and southwest Europe. The nominate genus is *Gallotia*, the endemic Canary Island lizards. All the main islands are home to two species, one small and one large, the latter including the three largest living lacertid lizards, from El Hierro (El Hierro Giant Lizard, *G. simonyi*; SVL 19¾ in/502 mm), La Palma (La Palma Giant

Lizard, *G. avaritae*; SVL 17½ in/444 mm), and Gran Canaria (Gran Canaria Giant Lizard, *G. stehlini*; SVL 14½ in/370 mm).

The El Hierro and La Palma species are listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN, while the Gran Canaria Giant Lizard may be threatened by the recently introduced California Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis californicae*), a specialist reptile predator. The Canary Islands lack native snakes, so the lizards may be vulnerable to predation and extinction.

**GALLOTIINAE****DISTRIBUTION**

Southwestern Europe, northwestern Africa, and the Canary Islands

**GENERA**

*Gallotia* and *Psammodromus*

**HABITATS**

Islands, desert, semidesert, open woodland, and other arid habitats

**SIZE**

SVL 1¾ in (44 mm) West Iberian Sand Racer (*Psammodromus occidentalis*) to 19¾ in (502 mm) El Hierro Giant Lizard (*Gallotia simonyi*)

**ACTIVITY**

Terrestrial, or occasionally semi-arboreal; diurnal and heliophilic



**LEFT |** The El Hierro Giant Lizard (*Gallotia simonyi*), the largest living member of the Lacertidae, is listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN.

**ABOVE |** The Algerian Sand Racer (*Psammodromus algirus*), sometimes called the Large Psammodromus, is the largest and most widely distributed member of its genus.

#### REPRODUCTION

All species are oviparous, producing a clutch of up to 12 leathery-shelled eggs, sometimes 2–3 times a year

#### DIET

Insects, spiders, fruit, and vegetation; also carrion and gastropods (*Gallotia*)

The giant *Gallotia* may also have been exploited by humans since prehistory, but the largest species (*G. goliath*, SVL 3 ft/0.9 m, TTL 4–5 ft/1.25–1.5 m) is only known from fossils and went extinct before the arrival of humans.

The genus *Psammodromus* contains six species of sand racers. Occurring through northwest Africa and southwest Europe, the largest and most widely distributed species is the Algerian Sand Racer (*P. algirus*), from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Gibraltar, Spain, Portugal, Andorra, southwest France, and the Italian island of Isola dei Conigli, near Lampedusa. It has also established on Mallorca in the Balearic Islands, following its introduction in the 1990s. The Algerian Sand Racer has a SVL of  $3\frac{1}{4}$  in (80 mm), but a TTL of  $12\frac{1}{4}$  in (310 mm), due to its exceedingly long tail. Other species, such as the Spanish Sand Racer (*P. hispanicus*), are half its size.