

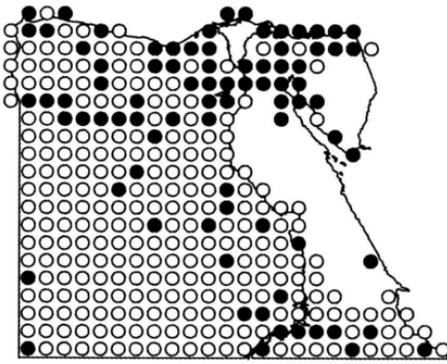
Acanthodactylus scutellatus (Audouin 1829) **Nidua Lizard** (Fig. 51)

Lacerta scutellata Audouin 1829: 172. Type locality: "Egypte." Holotype not located (Salvador 1982, Crochet et al. 2003)

Acanthodactylus scutellatus Boulenger 1920, Bons and Girot 1964, Salvador 1982, Arnold 1983, Crochet et al. (2003)

Arabic: *sihliyat al-raml*

Taxonomy: Monotypic. *A. hardyi* Haas 1957, inhabiting northern Arabia and long treated as a subspecies of *A. scutellatus*, has been shown to deserve treatment at the specific level based on molecular evidence (Harris and Arnold 2000). There is plenty of other justification for this based on its distinct morphology, preference of harder substrate (than *A. scutellatus*), and an apparent gap in distribution in Jordan. More recently Crochet et al. (2003) acknowledged *A. s. audouini* Boulenger 1918 as a valid subspecies based on the conclusions of Bons and Girot (1964). However, the great overlap in morphological characters and intergradation between the nominate form and *A. s. audouini* type animals makes it difficult to define these taxonomic units with consistency at the moment.



Nidua Lizard
(*Acanthodactylus scutellatus*)

Diagnosis: A moderately robust lizard. Adults have a SVL of up to 75 mm (SMB 8498, male from Wadi Abd El Malek). Snout rather narrow, with 5 supralabials anterior to the eye, subocular isolated from lip. Dorsal scales small, granular or subimbricate, smooth or slightly keeled. Average number of dorsals and ventrals at mid-body is

69 (range 56–78) and 13.7 (range 12–15), respectively; average number of femoral pores 21.6 (18–24) (based on a sample of 30 Egyptian specimens). Dorsal side of tibia covered with granular scales. Toes with 4 rows of scales. All digits are fairly strongly fringed, with subdigital scales more or less unicarinate. Dorsal surfaces sandy, mottled with blackish spots or vermiculation in a uniform fashion. Venter white, but adult females usually acquire a bright salmon-red pigment on the ventral side of the tail during the breeding season. Tail blue in juveniles. Hemipenis with one lobe; clavula flat, simple and ‘U’-shaped in cross-section.

Variation: Size and dorsal color and pattern differ considerably between various populations and even among individuals in a single population. Some of this is due to sexual dimorphism: whereas males are large and tend to have bolder pattern, females are smaller and often almost plain. Populations inhabiting better-vegetated regions usually have stronger pattern and more obviously keeled scale. The population inhabiting the dunes of the northern Delta is especially distinct and probably deserves subspecific treatment. These animals are large, robust, dark in color (gray with strong reticulation), and have a row of small granules, which separates the third pair of chin shields (usually in contact). Populations from the western Mediterranean coastal region tend to be smaller than others, and approach the definition of *A. dumerili* (Milne-Edwards

1829). Over much of the hinterland of the Western and Eastern deserts and Sinai, animals are usually almost uniform and have granular smooth dorsals. Further south, near Abu Simbel and the Gilf El Kebir Plateau animals are large, strongly reticulated with notably keeled dorsals, and the clavula of the hemipenis is rather tubular and complexly folded (not flat and simple as in northern populations). These animals approach the characteristics of *A. s. audouini*.

Habitat and ecology: Inhabits a variety of sandy biotopes, such as sand plains, dunes, and sandy wadis, usually with modest vegetation cover, but sometimes in areas with very little vegetation. Often also found in areas of fairly hard gravelly substrates but usually in close proximity to more favored sandy habitat. Can tolerate extreme desert conditions.

Range: Eastern North Africa from Mali and eastern Algeria to Egypt and Israel, south to Sudan.

Distribution in Egypt: Almost throughout the whole country, except in mountainous parts of South Sinai and the Eastern Desert and cultivated lands of the Nile Valley. In the Western Desert distribution is somewhat patchy. The species has been recorded in all the major oases, and many of the smaller oases like Kurkur and Dungul. Capocaccia (1977) reported one example collected from the Gilf El Kebir Plateau, in 1969, and several specimens were collected by the author in Wadi Abd El Malek in 1997. A single specimen (FMNH 167872) comes from Wadi Prince, Gebel Uweinat (locality in Libya close to Egyptian territory). In the Eastern Desert the species is known from a few wide wadis with sandy substrate (such as Wadi Araba), but in the central part it seems to be absent from large parts. It has been recorded in Wadi El Allaqi and Wadi El Gemal, on the maritime plain of the Gebel Elba region, and south into Sudan (Anderson 1898, Marx 1968, Baha El Din unpub. obs.). In Sinai it is confined to the northern part of the peninsula, but extends southward along the coastal plain of the Gulf of Suez.

Status and conservation needs: Common and widespread. Classified as Least Concern by IUCN (2005).

Genus *Latastia* Bedriaga 1884

Medium- to large-sized lacertids with long tails, nostril surrounded by 3–5 scales and usually reaches the first supralabial. Dorsals small and granular or imbricate. The genus *Latastia* encompasses 8 species (Arnold 1989) largely found in East Africa, particularly the Horn of Africa, with one species also occurring in southwest Arabia. *Latastia longicaudata* is the only species represented in Egypt.
