

Ophisops occidentalis BOULENGER, 1887

LC

Common names: North African Snake-eyed Lacertid (E), Lézard à oeil de serpent, *Ophisops occidentalis* (F), Lagartija magrebi de ojos de serpiente (S).

Range: North Africa, from northeastern Morocco to northwestern Egypt (west of the Nile; BAHA EL DIN 2006), although with a fragmented distribution from northeastern Libya (Tripolitania) to Egypt (KYRIAZI *et al.* 2008).

Distribution in Morocco: The range of *Ophisops occidentalis* in Morocco is restricted to the northeastern Hauts-Plateaux from Debdou to Aïn-Benimathar. Recent records from 40 km north of Aïn-Benimathar (DAMAS-MOREIRA *et al.* 2014) and 5 km northeast of Jerada (Philippe GENIEZ and Aurélien MIRALLES) suggest that the Moroccan populations may not be as isolated from the Algerian populations as previously thought.

Altitude: 928–1,300 m.

Identification: A small, slender lizard, often less than 40 mm SVL. Tail proportionately short, about twice the SVL. Transparent lower eyelids are fused with the upper lids to form a cap over the eye, a unique feature among Moroccan lacertids. Dorsal pattern brownish striated, composed of four dark and light stripes.



Fig. 515: *Ophisops occidentalis*, adult male. 53 km past Ain Bni Mathar towards Debdou. P. GENIEZ

Colour and pattern lose intensity and contrast on the posterior of the back. Venter grayish-white. Dorsal scales imbricate and strongly keeled. General appearance reminiscent to that of *Psammotromus blanci* which could be syntopic in Morocco, but the lidless eyes of *Ophisops* make it easy to differentiate them.



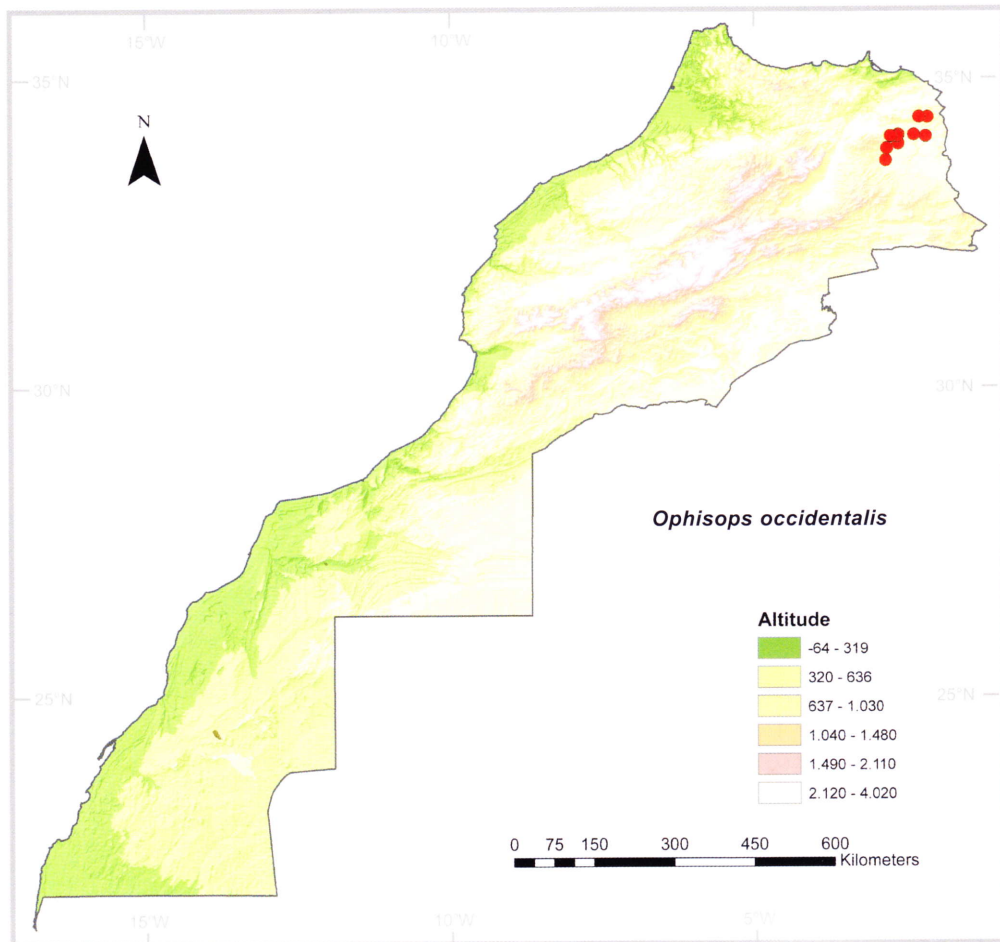
Fig. 516: *Ophisops occidentalis*, head detail. Tiouli.

G. MARTÍNEZ DEL MÁRMOL



Fig. 517: *Ophisops occidentalis*, male. 5 km northeast of Jerada.

P. GENIEZ



Habitat: Found on the Hauts-Plateaux in arid open habitats on solid ground with sparse vegetation cover of grasses as well as scrublands.

Biology: The knowledge of the biology of this species is poor and based on a few specimens from Tunisia and Algeria. Females lay 3–4 eggs at the end of April. Hatchlings possibly emerge in July, as observed in the related species, *Ophisops elegans* which, however, does not occur in Morocco.

Remarks: Mitochondrial DNA data suggest that Mediterranean *Ophisops* (*O. occidentalis* and *O. elegans*) are polyphyletic and may represent a species complex. Therefore, the current taxonomic status of these species needs revision (KYRIAZI *et al.* 2008).



Fig. 518: *Ophisops occidentalis*, detail of scalation. Tiouli.

G. MARTÍNEZ DEL MÁRMOL



Fig. 519: Portrait of a male *Podarcis vaucheri*. Jebel Bouhachem.

O. JIMÉNEZ ROBLES