

*Psammodromus blanci* (LATASTE, 1880)

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Common names: Blanc's Sand Racer, Blanc's *Psammodromus* (E), *Psammodrome* de Blanc (F), *Lagartija tunecina* (S).

Range: Northeastern Morocco, northern Algeria, and northwestern Tunisia.

Distribution in Morocco: Known from a dozen records in the northeasternmost region of Morocco, including the Spanish territory of Melilla (PLEGUEZUELOS *et al.* 2008)

Altitude: 0–1,150 m.

Identification: A small lizard, less than 5 cm SVL. Dorsal pattern with four light longitudinal stripes (white or slightly greenish in adults, beige in juveniles) on a brown background. Along each light stripe, an irregular and interrupted row of dark scales. In Morocco, the few observed individuals have a more or less continuous vertebral line of black scales. In eastern Algeria and Tunisia, this pattern is absent: in these countries, *Psammodromus blanci* frequently exhibit on the dorsum two wide dark longitudinal bands along the two light stripes bordering the dorsum but lack the vertebral line. Greenish individuals have been doubtfully reported in the past from Tunisia but not from Morocco. The throat is white, the belly sometimes whitish but more often

golden yellow, even in juveniles in which, however, it is paler. The presence of a distinct gular collar and fold differentiates this species from the otherwise similar *P. microdactylus*. Both taxa differ from *P. algirus* by reaching a much smaller size and having the two middle rows of ventrals smaller than the outer ones.



Fig. 535: Adult male from Debdou. Note the strong resemblance to *Ophisops occidentalis* but the closed eyelid visible in this picture indicates that this is a *Psammodromus blanci*.
S. FRAHM



Fig. 536: *Psammodromus blanci*, adult male. Melilla (Spain).

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Fig. 537: *Psammodromus blanci*, ventral aspect of a male. 53 km past Ain Beni Mathar towards Debdou.

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Fig. 538: *Psammodromus blanci*, head detail. Debdou. S. FRAHM



Fig. 539: *Psammodromus blanci*, dorsal view. Debdou. S. FRAHM

Habitat: Oak and pine woodland, scrubland and open areas such as meadows, pastures and steppes in humid to semiarid zones. In Morocco, especially in the increasingly rare Esparto Grass (*Stipa tenacissima*) steppes. Found locally in syntopy with *Ophisops occidentalis*.

Biology: Active almost throughout the year. The breeding season lasts from late February to June, during which time males engage in fights. From late March, females lay 2–4 eggs in up to four clutches. Hatchlings emerge 1–2 months later.

Remarks: The only morphological characters that consistently distinguish *Psammodromus blanci* from *P. microdactylus* are the gular scales pattern, the lack of a central series of strongly enlarged scales in the lower eyelid in *P. microdactylus* and the green dorsal colouration in breeding *P. microdactylus*, whereas other morphological differences reported in the literature are incorrect (IN DEN BOSCH 2005). Genetic data from Algerian and Tunisian specimens confirm that *P. blanci* is distinct from, but related to, *P. microdactylus* (MENDES *et al.* 2017). More complete sampling is needed to better determine intraspecific diversity, which seems to be high.



Fig. 540: Juvenile *Psammodromus microdactylus* from “Balcon d’Ito” (Middle Atlas).

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