



Fig. 150: *Phoenicolacerta laevis*, male, Shfela.

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Phoenicolacerta laevis (GRAY, 1838)
Lebanon lizard

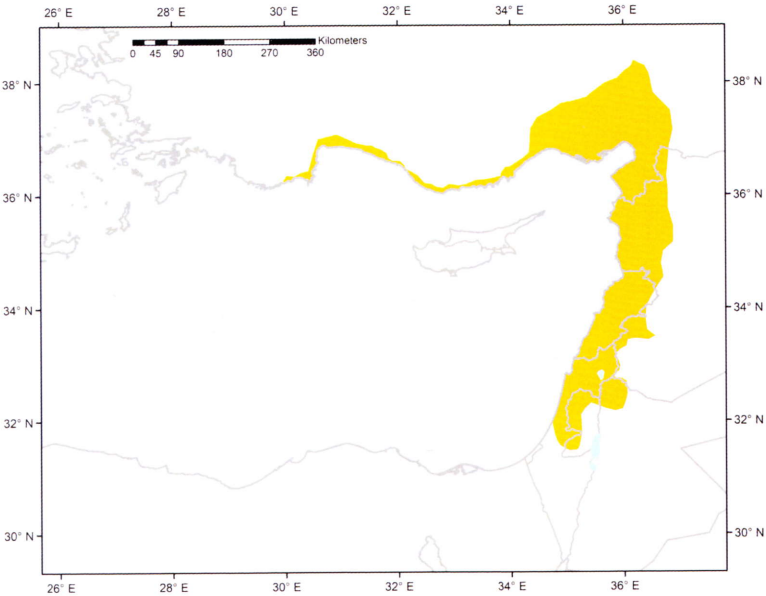
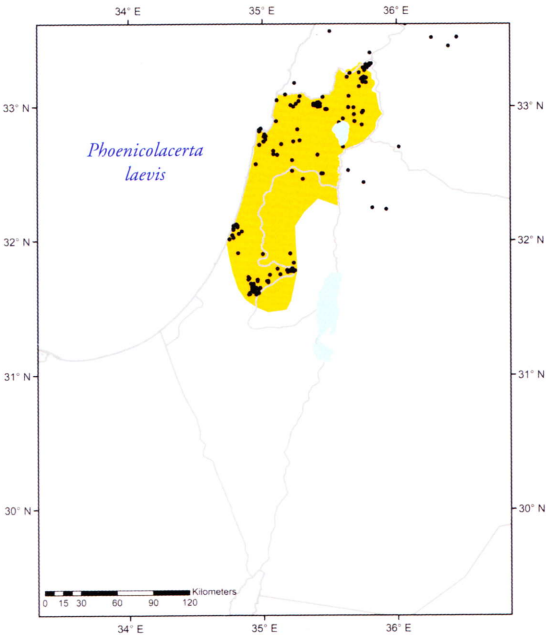
Hebrew name: *Leta'a Zriza* ("agile lizard")

Recent taxonomic changes: The genus *Lacerta* was split in 2007 into multiple genera, placing *laevis* (and *kulzeri*) in the newly erected genus *Phoenicolacerta*, named for its distribution along the Eastern Mediterranean. There is some genetic evidence for a deep divergence between Turkish and Levantine (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel) populations, with the former being more closely related to the Turkish *P. cyanisparsa* and Cypriot *P. troodica*; but no taxonomic study has followed the genetic one.

Size: Up to 255 mm total length, SVL 25–80 mm; weight 0.2–16 g. Males grow larger than females.

Description: A brown lizard sometimes covered with dark dots. It has a black stripe on each side of the body, sometimes accompanied by blue dots. The underside is greenish or turquoise. The coloration, especially of the males, increases in contrast during the mating season. The tail is twice as long as the body and breaks easily.

Similar species: *Lacerta media* (p. 173) juveniles have a striped pattern. *Phoenicolacerta kulzeri* (p. 187) ventral is uniform gray, white to cream color. *Phoenicolacerta laevis* is



greener and sometimes blue. However, their ranges do not overlap, as *P. kulzeri* is only found above 1,500 m elevation on the Hermon.

Natural history and behavior: A very common lizard found in a wide variety of Mediterranean habitats as well as stable sands; also common in urban environments. Active during the day, on the ground, among shrubs, and in trees. Its Hebrew name “Zriza” (meaning agile) reflects this lizard’s quick movement, and when fleeing it can easily climb trees and walls. It actively hunts arthropods. Females lay 3–4 clutches of 2–7 eggs from March through May, possibly even later, in a nest that they dig into moist soil. The young can hatch as late as October.

Distribution in Israel: From Be’er Sheva and northwards (but not in the southern Jordan Valley and Judean desert); expanding further south in human settlements.

World distribution: Southern Turkey, western Syria, Lebanon, northwestern Jordan, and Israel.

Conservation: IUCN Status: In Israel: Least Concern; Global: Least Concern (stable populations). The IUCN cites local habitat loss as the only cause of threat to this species, and such loss also undoubtedly occurs in the Israeli part of its range. Land-use changes also constitute a potential threat. In Israel, it is also known to be preyed upon by domestic cats and probably by cattle egrets as well. Thus, although it is still abundant, complacency regarding its future may be misplaced.



Fig. 151: *Phoenicolacerta laevis*, male, Shfela.

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