

EUROLIZARDS

Acanthodactylus erythrurus - Spiny-footed Lizard



Male: P / Sines, 19.04.2017 - Note the two continuous light vertebral and the light dorsolateral lines

The genus *Acanthodactylus* comprises about 40 species in the arid areas of Africa and Asia. Surprisingly, *Acanthodactylus erythrurus* is the only European representative of this group. In Europe, only the nominate subspecies occurs.

It inhabits large parts of Spain (except of the north) whereas its distribution in Portugal seems to be patchy with populations in the eastern part of the country and an isolated occurrence at the Lisbon and Alentejo coast. It prefers open habitats and may be a quite conspicuous lizard in coastal dune areas. With the 'fringes' on their spiny toes, they are able to move rapidly on loose sand. These beautiful but shy and fast lizards can best be observed basking at cooler temperatures in spring or autumn.

Adults show a camouflage pattern whereas juveniles with their distinct stripes and red tail are quite conspicuous. The red tail seems to be some kind of anti-predation strategy as it distracts from the lizard's body.

The Spiny-footed Lizard frequently co-occurs with the Iberian *Psammodromus* species. From these, *Acanthodactylus erythrurus* can be easily distinguished by its characteristic back pattern: *Acanthodactylus erythrurus* has two continuous light vertebral and light dorsolateral lines. At [Psammodromus hispanicus](#), [Psammodromus occidentalis](#) and [Psammodromus edwardsianus](#), these lines are interrupted to black and white bars which generate a 'checkered pattern'.

Subadult *Acanthodactylus erythrurus* (see below) may have similar patterns but at this stage they are much bigger than the small *Psammodromus* species.

From [Psammodromus algirus](#), *Acanthodactylus erythrurus* can be distinguished by its light vertebral lines and the black markings on its back. The latter one can also be identified by its strongly keeled scales.



European distribution range of *Acanthodactylus erythrurus*.



Female: P / Sines, 19.04.2017 - females often show reddish undersides of tails and hind legs.



Subadult: E / Cartagena, 13.11.2016 - Note the yellow lateral dots.



Juvenile with characteristic stripe pattern and reddish tail, E / San José (Almería), 15.09.2018



The 'Desierto de Tabernas' (Almería) - In this bare landscape, *Acanthodactylus erythrus* occurs in remarkably high numbers.

