



Psammodromus microdactylus
(BOETTGER, 1881)

EN

Common names: Small-fingered Psammodromus, Green Psammodromus (E), Psammodrome vert, Psammodrome à petits doigts (F), Lagartija verde (s).

Range: Endemic to Morocco.

Distribution in Morocco: Known from a few isolated populations in north and central Morocco, mainly in the Middle Atlas and the northern slope of the High Atlas Mountains. In most of these localities, *Psammodromus microdactylus* has not been seen in recent years. The latest observations of this rare and secretive species were made at “Balcon d’Ito” in the Middle Atlas (MATEO *et al.* 1993), west of Azilal (IN DEN BOSCH 2005) and in the same area by SCHWEIGER (2012) and MENDES *et al.* (2017).

Altitude: 90–2,250 m.

Identification: A small lizard attaining less than 5 cm SVL. In spring, dorsal colouration olive to bright green with two prominent longitudinal light green stripes on each side. Flanks are light brown to blackish, with two brown stripes trimming the two upper light stripes. The green tint disappears in summer to winter, and the animals are then entirely brown (IN DEN BOSCH 2005). Juveniles resemble adults without the green hue. Ventral parts are whitish with on some examined specimens in life the outer rows of ventral plates golden yellow. This species is very similar to *Psammodromus blanci*, from which it can be distinguished by the green dorsal colouration (during the mating season), the absence of a gular fold and collar and the lack of a central series of greatly enlarged scales in the lower eyelid (IN DEN BOSCH 2005).

Habitat: In regions characterised by humid to subhumid climate. Most observations were made in areas densely covered with Dwarf



Fig. 541: *Psammodromus microdactylus*, individual from Azilal.

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Palms (*Chamaerops humilis*), but in the High Atlas also occurs in rather open habitats.

Biology: Largely unknown. Seldom seen far away from a shelter. Unlike *Psammodromus algirus*, *P. microdactylus* is a slow-moving lizard and as an antipredatory strategy does not hide under stones or rocks but buries itself into leaf litter or loose gravel instead (IN DEN BOSCH 2005). This behaviour may explain the scarcity of observations. Confirmed food items include spiders, mosquitos, beetles and caterpillars.

Remarks: Many supposed morphological differences between *P. microdactylus* and *P. blanci* reported in the literature are incorrect (see IN DEN BOSCH [2005]) for a detailed assessment). It is not entirely clear whether this species is genuinely rare as claimed by CROCHET *et al.* (2004) or just highly elusive (IN DEN BOSCH 2005), although recent targeted searches have confirmed some localities. There is substantial infraspecific genetic diversity based on a few specimens (MENDES *et al.* 2017).



Fig. 542: *Psammodromus microdactylus*, adult male. West of Azilal.

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Fig. 543: *Psammodromus microdactylus*, same specimen shown in Fig. 542.

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