



European Wall Lizard

Scientific name: *Podarcis muralis*

European Wall Lizards are an introduced species that looks similar to our native Northwestern Alligator Lizard. Where their ranges overlap, you can distinguish between the Northwestern Alligator Lizard and the European Wall Lizard by their shape and colour. Wall Lizards have a relatively flattened body with long limbs and long toes. Like other species of Wall Lizards, they have an angular head with a prominent jaw. Males are 16-23 cm in total length, while females usually are slightly smaller in length and weight. The tail is twice as long as the body.

The backs of Wall Lizards are green or brown with black blotches. Their bellies are often a very light creamy brown with light spots that get denser at the throat. The sides of male Wall Lizards have bright blue spots running down them that resemble a thick line. This is seen in some females, but the spots tend to be much smaller and lighter.

European Wall Lizards are very active and are easily seen in the open basking or hunting for food. They are very quick at climbing and running and even jump from object to object when being chased. If a lizard is captured by its tail, it autotomizes (drops) the tail and runs away. The dropped tail keeps wiggling for several minutes, which helps to distract the predator and allow the lizard to escape. The broken tail area begins to heal right away and a new tail will grow back, but it will be a slightly different colour than the original.

Making a living

On Vancouver Island, European Wall Lizards usually hibernate between November and March. However, they occasionally are seen basking in the open on warm days in February and December.

Wall Lizards are oviparous (they lay eggs) and they can deposit eggs more than once per year. The number of eggs ranges from 3 to 11, depending on the size of the female. Mating occurs shortly after the lizards come out of hibernation (usually mid March). About one month later the first clutch (batch of eggs) is laid. If it is a good year, with lots of sun and food, a female will deposit up to two more clutches before the end of summer. Larger females usually produce more clutches than small females.

The eggs are buried in the ground or placed under a piece of bark or a rock. The eggs incubate for a month until the juvenile Wall Lizards hatch. Hatchling Wall Lizards immediately begin finding food while trying to avoid all the dangers of the world, such as avian predators.

What's for dinner?

European Wall Lizards eat flying and ground insects such as flies and beetles along with many types of spiders. They are fast predators and have been seen jumping off the ground to catch flying insects. When Wall Lizards catch a large insect they firmly bite it and then thrash their head back and forth until it stops moving. They then put the prey item down and carefully eat it. These lizards also will eat fruit and berries.

Places and spaces

The European Wall Lizards' native or natural habitat is southern and central Europe and northwestern Asia. This lizard often is found on rock faces, open woodlands and human created areas such as stone and wood piles, brick and stone walls, railways and roadsides. In British Columbia, the Wall Lizard is found on the Saanich Peninsula of Vancouver Island just east of the city of Victoria. They are found in ditches, along fence lines, power lines, on driveways and even on the sides of houses!

Past, present, and...future?

European Wall Lizards were introduced to the Saanich Peninsula of Vancouver Island in 1970, after the private zoo that housed the lizards closed. Since that time Wall Lizards have become firmly established and are spreading. Several separate populations are now present on Vancouver Island due to people collecting the lizards and releasing them at new locations (such as their yards and gardens). To prevent the spread of these lizards it is very important to never, never capture them or move them, even a short distance.

Wall Lizards live in some of the same areas as Northwestern Alligator Lizards. The two lizards have been seen basking on the same rocks and are suspected to hibernate together in at least one location. Little is known about the effects of Wall Lizards on Alligator Lizards but since they share habitat in some locations and eat similar things, there is potential for competition. Monitoring and study of the European Wall Lizard on Vancouver Island will help to determine if this lizard will have negative effects on our native lizards. If you see a European Wall Lizard, help us monitor their spread by contacting your regional branch of the Ministry of Water, Land, and Air Protection.