



Fig. 329: Head scalation of a Multi-ocellated Racerunner from the Tuva Republic.
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burrows in soft soils, often at the base of *Caragana* bushes and rock piles. Also, Pika and Tarbagan Marmot burrows are used as shelters by these lizards.

This species is diurnal. Its active season lasts from April to early October. Lizards overwinter in underground tunnels at a depth of at least 50 cm.

The Multi-ocellated Racerunner is ovoviviparous. Mating occurs in May, and gestation lasts 2–2.5 months. Females release 2–5 follicles each season, but only 3 (rarely 4) of these develop into embryos. In Tuva, females with a body length of 5.6 cm are already mature and give birth to 3–4 young at a time. The babies have body lengths of 2.4–3.3 cm and tail lengths of 3.3–4.0 cm at birth, and are born between the second half of July and mid-August.

The main food is beetles and ants, less often and in smaller quantities other insects and spiders. The seeds and fruits of *Ephedra* are also eaten.

Conservation status: The Multi-ocellated Racerunner is included in the Red Data Books of Russia and Tuva.

Gobi Racerunner or Przewalski's Racerunner
Eremias przewalskii (STRAUCH, 1876)

Figs. 330–332, Map 67

The curator, later director, of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Alexander A. STRAUCH, who described this racerunner, named it in honour of the great Russian traveler and explorer of Central Asia, Nikolay Mikhaylovich PRZEWALSKI (or PRZHEVALSKY).

External appearance: A rather large racerunner with a relatively long tail and limbs; the body length may reach 9.8 cm, the tail length 14 cm. The largest individuals are found in the southern part of the species' range. In Tuva, the maximum body length is just 8.1 cm. The head is long, pyramidal in shape, with a long snout, gradually narrowing and rounded at its tip.

The dorsal scales are smooth, weakly depressed or convex, and those bordering the venter are flatter and larger. The femoral pores do not reach the knee joint. There are two enlarged shields in the cloacal region.



Map 66: *Eremias multiocellata*.

Pattern and colouration are variable. The main ground colour of the upper side of the body is grey, sandy or yellowish-ochre, depending on the colour of the substrate the lizard lives on. The pattern consists of thin, merging or winding brown lines, large dark spots or crossbands. Gobi Racerunners from the western part of the range, i. e., Tuva Republic and western Mongolia, have a series of blue, black-edged ocelli on their flanks starting from the level of the front legs; such eyespots are less conspicuous in females. In the southern parts of the species' range, Gobi Racerunners lack blue ocelli. The top of the head is adorned with a pattern composed of large dark spots. The belly is milky white, unmarked. The tail of hatchlings is greenish; otherwise, they do not differ much from adults.

Distinguishing features: The Gobi Racerunner differs from the Multi-ocellated Racerunner by having a strong, intricate reticulate pattern on its back and by some by scalation characteristics.

Distribution and subspecies: The Gobi Racerunner is common in Mongolia and in the arid regions of China. In Russia, it has been recorded only from the south of the Tuva Republic, which is at the northern limit of its range.

Two subspecies are recognized, of which *E. p. tuvensis* SZCZERBAK, 1970, is found in Russia. However, most authorities no longer consider this subspecies valid.

Natural history: Gobi Racerunners are associated with soft soils. They settle on loosely fixed slopes of sand dunes, among islets and occasional thickets of grass, in wormwood and *Astragalus* shrubs, and in hilly sands with niterbush. They live at altitudes ranging between 760–1,800 m a. s. l. In the Tuva Republic, racerunners with body lengths of up to 6 cm are found on the loose slopes of



Map 67: *Eremias przewalskii*.



Fig. 330: A Gobi Racerunner, *Eremias przewalskii* from the Tuva Republic.
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Fig. 331: Portrait of a Gobi Racerunner.

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Fig. 332: Another Gobi Racerunner from the Tuva Republic.

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dunes. Along the southern border of the sands, specimens with body lengths of 5.6–8.1 cm live among *Caragana* bushes, clumps of Chee Grass, under pieces of debris and discarded objects. Along the northern boundary of the sands, they are found among poplars and *Caragana*. They dig their own burrows, 30–40 cm long, under shrubs, more often at their base. This species is diurnal; in summer, it ceases its activity during the hottest hours, especially in southern regions. Based on observations made in Tuva, this species retreats to its overwintering sites in the first decade of October. The Gobi Racerunner, similarly to the Multi-ocellated Racerunner, is an ovoviparous lizard. From the second half of July to mid-August, females give birth to 1–3 young with body lengths of 2.5–3.1 cm and tail lengths of 2.6–3.4 cm. In the sands of Zuger-Els, at the beginning of July, 4–5 embryos were found inside females at different stages of development, and one female gave birth to five babies in a terrarium. Females reach sexual maturity in the second year of life at a minimum body length of about 6.5 cm. The diet of this species includes dipterans, beetles, hymenopterans, butterflies and varies depending on location. Cases of cannibalism have been recorded. At times when niterbush berries ripen, these racerunners "graze" on the bushes, and avidly eat berries as well as young leaves.

Conservation status: The Gobi Racerunner is included in the Red Data Books of Russia and Tuva.

Rapid Steppe Runner

Eremias velox (PALLAS, 1771)

Figs. 333–336, Map 68

This is the nimblest racerunner. Not only does it run quickly on flat surfaces but it also moves with great ease on steep cliffs, and climbs into bushes to cool itself or eat seeds and fruit.

External appearance: The Rapid Steppe Runner may reach a body length of 7.8 cm, a tail length of 14.4 cm and a body weight of 2.8–15 g. The suborbital scale touches the edge of the mouth; the



Map 68: *Eremias velox*.

supraoculars are completely separated by a series of granules from the frontal and frontoparietal scales.

Pattern and colour depend on age and gender, and vary widely within the species' range. Juveniles have a distinctive pattern of dark, longitudinal stripes on their back, with the middle band splitting on the neck. On the sides of the body, there are the same stripes with bright, dark-edged ocelli with a located on these stripes. In adults, the upper side of the body is grey, sandy or olive coloured, and the longitudinal stripes are less bright, or, also, they break into separate spots of irregular shape. Ocelli that are pale and dark-edged, on the sides of the body of adults, become blue or greenish; the undersurface of the thighs, front legs, and collar are yellowish in spring, and white in summer and autumn. Young and immature specimens differ from the adults also by the exceptionally bright colour, ranging from blood red to dark orange, on the undersurface of their tail and thighs.

Distinguishing features: This species differs from the Steppe Runner by its lighter build, longer tail, the bright colouration of the undersurface of tail in juveniles and by having colourful ocelli in adult males.

Distribution and subspecies: The Rapid Racerunner is widespread in northern and north-eastern Iran, northern Afghanistan,



Fig. 333: A Rapid Steppe Runner, *Eremias velox*, showing the characteristic livery of juveniles. The striped pattern and the red ventral surface of the tail distinguish young individuals from adults.

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