

Mesalina martini (Boulenger 1897) **Red Sea Lizard** (Fig. 57)
Eremias martini Boulenger 1897: 467. Type locality: Obok, Somalia.

Holotype: Lost

Eremias guttulata martini Boulenger 1921

Eremias guttulata Anderson 1898 (part)

Eremias olivieri martini Haas 1951, Hoofien and Yaron 1964

Mesalina martini Arnold 1986, Joger and Mayer 2002

Arabic: *sihliyat al-bahr al-ahmar*

Taxonomy: *Mesalina martini* was until recently regarded as a subspecies of *M. olivieri*, but Arnold (1986) indicated that it should be treated as a full species due to significant hemipenial differences. Baha El Din (in prep.) reports the discovery of a small population of *Mesalina* from the southern Egyptian Red Sea coast, which fits the diagnostic features of *M. martini* (low number of dorsals, highly striated coloration). This is the first confirmed report of this taxon from Egypt. The specimen that Boulenger (1921) indicated came from

“Mount Sinai” (BMNH 82.8.16.17) is apparently part of a mislabeled shipment of specimens, which most likely have originated from near Suakin, Sudan (see further comments under *Hemidactylus sinaitus* and *Tarentola annularis*).

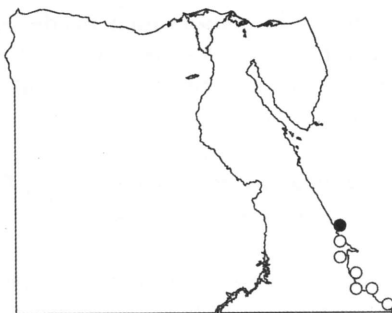
Diagnosis: A small lizard, largest Egyptian specimen has SVL of 44 mm. Snout

relatively short, usually with 4 or 5 supralabials anterior to the subocular. Lower eyelid with a window made of 5–8 semi-transparent scales of subequal size, not edged with black pigment. Temporals small, smooth; tympanic shield small and not obvious. Dorsal scales medium-sized, granular, or subimbricate. Average number of dorsals at mid-body 39 (range 38–40) and ventrals 10, respectively; average number of femoral pores 15 (14–16) (based on a sample of 3 Egyptian specimens: SMB 11019, 11038, 11040). Ventral side of lower arm covered with large imbricate scales. Dorsal side of tibia covered with weakly keeled scales. Subcaudals smooth. Dorsal surfaces sandy gray, with a strong striated pattern of longitudinal dark and light stripes, which might include some small ocelli in a few adult specimens. Tail yellowish in young animals. Venter white. Hemipenis large, with two lobes.

Habitat and ecology: In Egypt it has been found on sandy substrate among halophytic vegetation immediately on the Red Sea coast.

Range: Shores of the southern Red Sea on both the Arabian and African sides. Anderson's (1898) records of “*Mesalina guttulata*” with clearly striated dorsum and large dorsal scales from the vicinity of Suakin, Sudan (Plate 23, Fig. 4), are doubtless referable to *M. martini*.

Distribution in Egypt: Only documented from the delta of Wadi El Gemal, but *Mesalina* sp. tracks found by the author among halophytic vegetation on the maritime plain near Gebel Elba probably belong to this species. The species probably occupies suitable littoral habitats of the southern Egyptian Red Sea from the Delta of Wadi El Gemal to the Sudanese borders.



Red Sea Lizard
(*Mesalina martini*)

Status and conservation needs: Rare and localized. Its coastal habitat is being lost and degraded by rapidly expanding tourism developments along the Red Sea shores. Classified as Least Concern by IUCN (2005).
