

Emerald Lizard – *Lacerta viridis*

Characteristics

With a max. body length of 40 cm, two thirds of it the tail, the emerald lizard is the largest indigenous lizard. It has a high, pointed head and a long, thin tail. Its most striking feature is the grass green coloring of the upper body. However, coloring and marking differ according to age and gender.

Dissemination and habitat

The emerald lizard populates mostly sunny rocks or warm dry places on hillsides up to about 600 m. above sea level that are partly covered with bushes or some single trees and can as such provide a hiding place. In Austria it reaches its western dissemination limit. Its main populations are concentrated on the valley slopes of eastern Austria, Carinthia, along the Danube, the Kamp and the Drau.

Lifestyle

Every year at the beginning of May, an impressive show takes place on the vantage points of the Max plateau and the Überstieg: the emerald lizards go looking for a mate! For this, the male smartens itself up accordingly as females will only be impressed and persuaded to mate by a bright blue throat. And sometimes this animalistic courtship behavior seems terribly familiar to us! The exuberant coloring of the male partner is mainly destined to attract attention. Beauty is an indicator for intact genes in the animal world.

First competing males engage in so called behavioral fights. They are introduced by bending heads, lifting necks and whipping tails. During these fights, males try to bite each other in the back of the head or in the extremities. In doing so, they wildly swirl around their own body axis. One particular movement is the "stepping" – an attitude of humility in front of dominant males whereby the head moves up and down and the front legs are used to step on the spot. If a lizard behaves like this, it will not be attacked. The same behavior can also be observed with females that are not ready for mating. As the animals have only eyes for each other, impressive sightings can easily happen.

Four weeks after copulation, during which the male bites the female into the flanks, the female buries its 8 to 10 bean-sized eggs into the ground. In September the 6 to 9 cm long young ones hatch. And by the beginning of November, they hide in their winter quarters until March/April.

Particularity

One can often see lizards with short tails. These are animals which just escaped death. When in danger, lizards can detach their tail if they get caught by it (an act called autonomy). It carries on twisting and moving for another half hour so that the enemy then attacks the tail and the lizard can escape. However, a lizard may only shed its tail once in a lifetime, after which a short cartilaginous part grows back. However, these animals are then no longer sexually attractive for their pairs and have fewer chances at finding a partner. Therefore, please do not catch a lizard!

Threat and protection status

Reallocation of land, construction or agricultural development as well as the use of biocides are the main threats. Nevertheless, the emerald lizard is still well represented and is not "acutely threatened" in its dissemination centers. In the Austrian Red List it is registered as highly threatened, and it is mentioned in Annex IV of the Fauna-Flora-Habitat Directive.