

European Legless Lizard

Ophisaurus apodus

Reptile

Scientific Name:

Ophisaurus apodus

Other Names:

Glass lizard

Range:

Southeastern Europe, from the Balkan Peninsula to Turkey and Syria, and into Central Asia

Habitat:

Brush steppes and open temperate forests

Average Size:

Length: 35 - 40 in.

Weight: 200 - 400 g.

Description:

Long slender lizard with no legs. The large, hard scales are brown to yellow with lighter underparts.

Lifespan:

In the wild: Unknown

In captivity: Estimated at 20 years

Diet:

In the wild: Arthropods, snails and small mammals

In the zoo: Small mice and insects

Sexual Maturity:

Estimated at 5 years

Clutch Size

6 - 12 eggs

Incubation Period:

Estimated at 6 weeks

Predators:

Carnivores and birds of prey

Population Status:

Not Threatened



Conservation

Although legless lizard populations are stable throughout most of their range, they face multiple hazards as their regions become more and more populated and wars destroy habitat. Because of their close resemblance to snakes, many local people perceive them as a threat and kill them. In some areas, they are still gathered for the pet trade, even though many breeders have had success with rearing them in captivity.

As an increasing number of reptile species face extinction, legless lizard skin may become more popular for use in boots, jackets and other trinkets. Education efforts throughout their range are needed to prevent legless lizards from being overhunted.

Behavior

These lizards are crepuscular (active at dusk and before dawn) or nocturnal ground dwellers. They are able to swim and climb trees, but do so only out of necessity. Their rather blunt heads are filled with sharp, cone-shaped teeth that are useful for crushing arthropod exoskeletons or snail shells.

They are mostly solitary, spending the daylight hours sunning themselves on rocks or tree limbs. Rather than lying in ambush for prey to pass by, European legless lizards are active predators that scour the forest floor in search of prey. They can use their nose to burrow under leaves or under ground.

Because they have no legs, they slither away with very snake-like movements when threatened.

Reproduction and Breeding

Breeding season for legless lizards varies depending on the region in which they live. Males actively search for nearby females for mating and may fight with other males to secure breeding rights. After mating, the male leaves the female and plays no further role in parenting. The female, on the other hand, is a protective mother. Once she lays her eggs in a small burrow or tree cavity, she coils around the clutch to guard and protect it. She only ventures out occasionally to eat.

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The Sacramento Zoological Society
3930 West Land Park Dr., Sacramento, CA 95822
T: 916-808-5888 F: 916-264-7385 E: info@saczoology.org

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Once the young hatch, they are on their own. Although they might remain near their mother for a short time, she will not assist or protect them. Within a few days, they have all moved into the forest to find their own territories.

Amazing Facts

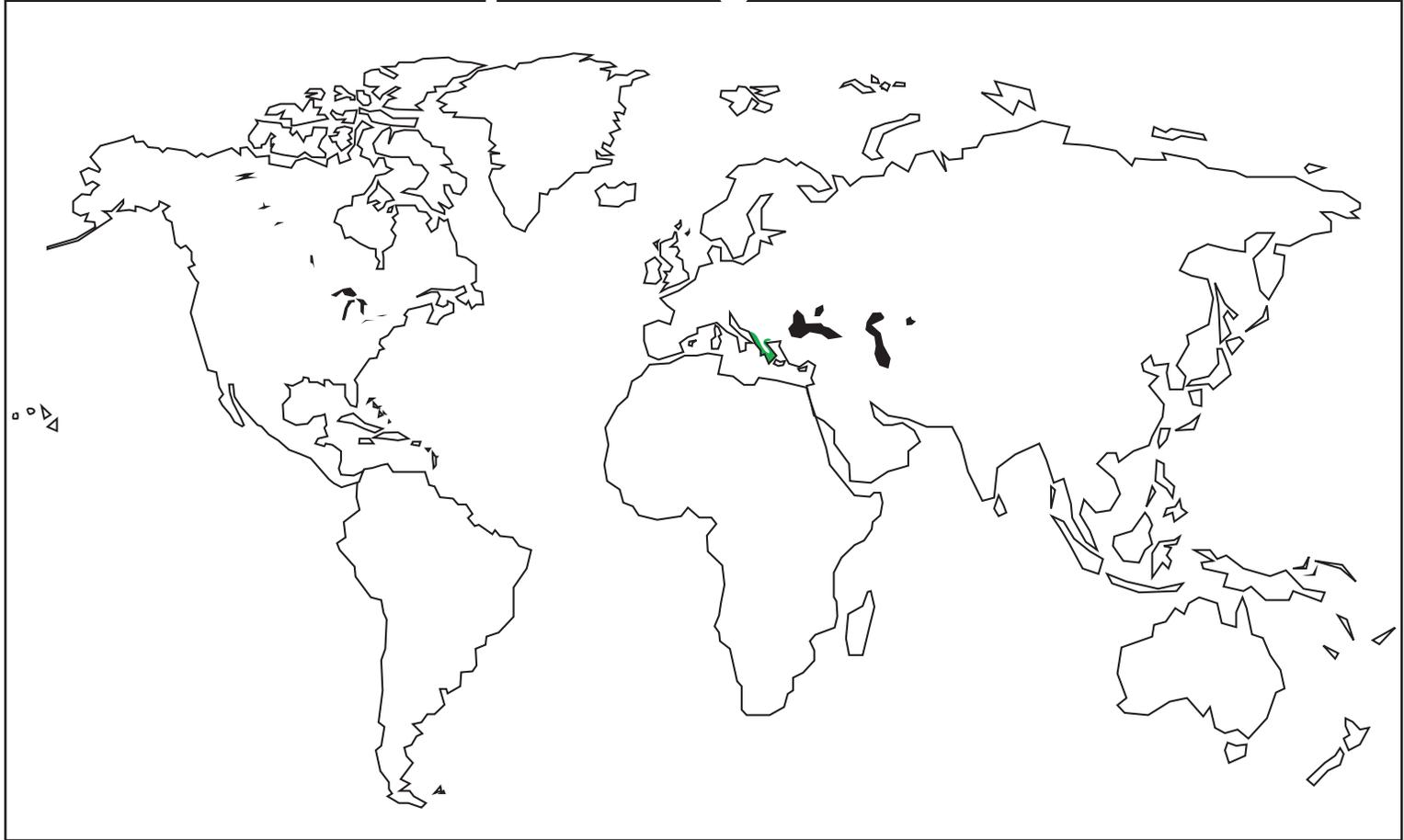
There are roughly 10 species of legless or glass lizards!

These lizards can drop their tail in the event of an emergency, but they do so reluctantly as it takes many months and much energy to grow another one!

Although these lizards have no legs, they do have hind limb remnants that are still visible!

Biologists believe the lizards' lack of legs is an adaptation for burrowing!

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