



# Lizard-spotting on Ibiza

There is much more to Ibiza than partying, and if you are planning an out-of-season break to the island, or to warmer climates generally, John Courtney-Smith passes on some tips which should help you to locate lizards successfully.

I have to admit that I am not that keen on airports or sitting on a plane for ages, plus the potential difficulties of trying to communicate in a foreign language. Even though Ibiza is easily reached on a direct flight and English is widely-spoken, I admit that I still hesitated about going at first. Then my wife reminded me that there is an endemic species of lizard on Ibiza and some isolated reports of snakes being found there for the first time.....

## Initial disappointment

Mind made up and payments sent, we set off for Es Cana in Ibiza. The island is beautiful and amazingly hot, with the sound of cicadas growing in volume as the heat of the day increases. Small insectivorous birds appear to hover as they fly from branch to branch harvesting small flies.

As soon as we had unpacked and settled in, I was off with the camera and my son to search for lizards. I must confess that we



Male lizards are larger and more brightly-coloured than the females.

Photo by the author.

found exactly none on the first day, which was disappointing. We decided to get up early the next day though, and have another look. Very soon we noticed the distinctive flick of a tail and flash of green as we walked along Es Cana beach. The sun has no real power until about 10.00am and so the lizards move onto those rocks and walls that are in full sun, as they begin to warm up in the early morning.

The Ibizan wall lizard (*Podarcis pityusensis*) is a long and stoutly-built wall lizard with the typical snout of the Lacertidae family. Although this species is originally from Ibiza, it also occurs now in Spain, having hitched a lift back to the mainland where it is becoming established. There are also related sub-species found on the neighbouring islands of Menorca and Majorca. The females have a rusty brown body fading into a grey tail. The males are brighter, displaying emerald green coloration, and are about a third larger than the females.

These wall lizards almost seem to live in small families, with groups often spotted together. We also observed males displaying to other males and even fighting on one occasion. Their territories seem compact and where you find one male, you can always find another not far away. The lizards live in scrub but can also occur very close to the sea and I even saw one hunting in a rock pool. Small black flies seem to make up the majority of the diet.

As the day heats up, the lizards become incredibly fast and will run away as you walk past. We did observe a young male which



These lizards will bask regularly on white rocks which heat up readily in the sun. Photo by the author.