

## EUROPEAN WALL LIZARD

Fossils of this lizard have been found in a cave in Greece dating to the early part of the Holocene period (11,000 – 12,000 years ago). *Podarcis muralis* has wide distribution in Europe where it is known as the Common Wall Lizard. There is now a well-established, introduced population in North America, where it is referred to as the European Wall Lizard.

### Description:

Size varies between the sexes, with female lizards being slightly smaller than males, which can grow to about 23 cm (9") in total length.



- Long, slender, flattened body with long fingers and toes (not sticky).
- Grow to 6.5 cm (2.5") in length (snout to base of tail).
- Long tails, up to 1.5 times the body length.
- HAVE dark spots on their throat and/or belly (unlike Italian Wall Lizards which are also invasive)
- Do not have skin folds on back and sides of body.
- Variable in colour ranging from brown to grey to green. May have

black-blue spots on the flank (especially males)

- May have prominent flecks of green on the back, which may be more intense near the shoulders
- Are oviparous (egg-laying), depositing 3-11 eggs once or twice per year depending on summer's duration
- Wall lizards can detach their tails as an escape method
- Can live up to 10 years

### What is their habitat?

They are successful invaders due to their diet, reproduction, and temperature tolerance. To avoid cold winter temperatures, Wall Lizards hibernate below the frost for months at a time. In southwestern B.C. they are active in winter on sunny days.

- Mainly ground dwelling, they are found on rock faces, open woodlands, and areas of human development (stone and wood piles, concrete and brick walls, railways, roadsides etc.), where sun exposure is abundant.
- They are fast moving and good climbers, often seen in trees or on sides of buildings.

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## What do European Wall Lizards Eat?

- Pollinators: mason bees, bumblebees and even wasps.
- Insects such as grasshoppers, crickets, spiders, caterpillars, moths, and butterflies
- Fruit and berries
- Baby garter snakes, local frog species, other lizards
- Their own young, who, seemingly aware, scurry away soon after hatching

## Impact/Threat to Environment:

The BC Inter-Ministry Invasive Species Working Group has determined European Wall Lizards to be a 'high risk to BC and not yet established'. It's management objective is to 'Prevent' their introduction and establishment. The European Wall Lizard negatively impacts B.C.'s native lizard species, the Northern Alligator Lizard (*Elgaria coerulea*), the Pacific chorus frog (*Pseudacaris regilla*) and the endangered Sharp-Tailed Snake (*Contia tenuis*) through competition for food and habitat. The hundreds of thousands on Vancouver Island are considered agricultural pests preying on much-needed pollinators.



Note: The native Northern Alligator Lizard is a stockier lizard with no green colouration; they are brown overall, with a pale belly and dark blotches or a bronze stripe down the back. Shown to the right →.

## How to limit their spread?

- Learn to identify European Wall Lizards
- Do not possess, breed, release, sell or transport live European Wall Lizards in B.C.
- Check for stowaways in transported materials, especially garden supplies or natural materials
- Raise awareness to avoid the spread of this species into B.C.

## How to get rid of European Wall Lizards?

### Humane Extermination:

- Some islanders use buckets sunk in the ground with water in the bottom and pitched at a 45-degree angle. Lizards that slide in for a drink can't climb out since their toes are not sticky.
- To euthanize them, put captured lizards in a fridge until they lapse into a torpid state, then into a freezer. They have to be frozen solid as they can survive partial freezing.



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European Wall Lizards provide food for birds like kestrels, cats and rats. The main concern is the damage they do to pollinators and hence, food crops.

### **Spread – Where did these *invasive creatures* come from?**

European Wall Lizards found in B.C. are thought to be native to Italy. The lizard's introduction in B.C. can be traced to a private roadside zoo that opened in Saanich in 1957 with monkeys, lions and a dozen wall lizards imported from Italy. When the owner closed it in 1970, the bigger animals went to the Greater Vancouver Zoo. According to academic studies, the owner simply turned the lizards loose. Intentionally released or escaped pets may have also established additional populations. The current population in British Columbia is estimated to be between 500,000 and 700,000.

They can now be found throughout Greater Victoria. The spread of these lizards may occur at a rate of 1 km every 10 years (as has been observed for some populations in the USA). They've now established in other populations in Ucluelet and Nanaimo and appear as far north as Campbell River, 265 km from Victoria. They sneak trips hiding in camping gear, on farm vehicles and hay bales and their eggs get ferried around inadvertently in plants and potting soils. Children help their distribution by taking them home as pets. They have been spotted in the last two years in the lower mainland near Chilliwack, on Salt Spring Island and other southern gulf islands.

References:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/invasive-species>

<https://macleans.ca/society/environment/the-wall-lizard-invasion-of-vancouver-island>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podarcis\\_muralis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podarcis_muralis)

Gavin Hanke, the Royal B.C. Museum's Curator of Vertebrate Zoology, October 2021 issue of *Macleans*'s magazine