



Scientific Name:

*Chalchides ocellatus
tiligugu*

English:

Ocellated Skink

Maltese:

xahmet l-art

The lizard-like Ocellated Skink is the only native skink found in the Maltese Islands. Unlike the more common lizards which may be found basking in the sun; this reptile prefers to remain unseen. When met with in the countryside, it is usually found in hiding in rubble wall crevices, under stones or other rocky outcrops.

The species is highly adapted to living in hot climates like ours; has an elongated cylindrical body, which can reach a length of 30cm; is covered by smooth shiny scales and is generally olive-brown to brown in colour with rows of white and dark brown spots. The skink also has a rather small head and a fairly thick neck; very short feet with well-developed toes; and a thin tail. The species is also one of the few known to be oviparous . This means that the species gives birth to live young - since eggs are carried and hatched internally by the female. Crawling on its underside, its swift movements resemble those of a snake. The Skink has a varied diet, which includes snails, woodlice, spiders, ants and beetles. It may also consume small lizards and vegetation.

Although some people dislike or are afraid of skinks because of misconceptions that these creatures are harmful or carry diseases; these reptiles are still part of the local heritage and should be safeguarded. For this reason the species, as all Maltese reptiles, has been protected under local legislation enacted in 1992. This legislation outlaws pursuing, taking, killing or keeping these reptiles. Furthermore, the skink is also considered to be of importance at European level.

Recent studies have shown that, locally, the Ocellated Skink has a favourable conservation status which means that although threatened, it is capable of maintaining itself on a long-term basis.

The subspecies of Ocellated Skink found in Malta has a restricted distribution in the world and is mostly found in Sicily, including Pantalleria, the Maltese Islands and the Maghreb.