

Semaphore Geckos

By Wolfgang Wranik

The majority of the known reptiles from the archipelago are geckos. Seven species, all endemic, belong to the semaphore genus *Pristurus*. They can be divided into two groups. The main difference between them is the presence or absence of a tail crest. The first group comprises *Pristurus sokotranus*, *P. abdelkuri*, *P. guichardi*, *P. obsti* and *P. samhaensis*. All share a number of external features, such as body shape, lateral markings on the neck and shoulder region, and a dorsal tail crest which is more distinct in males. *Pristurus insignis* and *P. insignoides* form the second group. They are more slender in build and without a crest of enlarged scales on the tail in either sex. The few records in some species and the difficulty in distinguishing these swift moving animals in the field means, however, that it is not possible at present to assess their status and distribution in detail. Little is also known of their biology. The specimens are often infested with larvae of trombiculid mites, and it seems that their diet consists to a large extent of ants, termites and other insects.

Pristurus sokotranus Parker, 1938

Pristurus sokotranus

Length up to almost 100 mm.

Endemic, known only from Socotra.



Widespread and common from the plain to the mountains, and generally found among the larger rocks or on boulders in the dry beds of watercourses, where they may frequently be seen sunning themselves, but they occur also in the villages. Occasionally they climb on trunks of trees. They are active all day, constantly on the alert for danger and swift in their movements, taking refuge in crevices.

P. sokotranus lays a single egg which is deposited in the ground or beneath stones. Apparently worker ants make up a high proportion of prey items, according to Arnold (1993) comprising over 60 % of examined stomach contents.

In response to conspecifics and observers *P. sokotranus* (also *P. abdelkuri* and *P. samhaensis*) performs special signals, often in the same order, and with each motion repeated on the average three to four times.

1. Raising of the whole body as far from the ground as possible.
2. The tail is slightly curved, raised upwards, held stiff and moved up and down.
3. The tail is moved back to the ground and wagged from side to side.