

NOTES ON SOME OF THE REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS OF NORTH-EAST GREECE

KEITH WERB

17 Drury Road, Colchester, Essex.

Though much field-work has already been carried out on the herpetofauna of Greece (Clark 1968), most of it appears to have been concentrated on the many islands and the southern mainland in particular, so it was with considerable interest that I departed for an overland holiday to the Sithonian peninsula, North-east Greece on May 26th 1979. Also on the trip with me were my wife, son and two friends.

The first reptile of the trip was not sighted until the third morning, by which time we had reached North-west Yugoslavia. On stopping for dinner along the road to Ljubjana I explored a small rubbish tip nearby and on lifting up a piece of cardboard in some long grass I found a female Smooth Snake, *Coronella austriaca*, an interesting capture as it was the first specimen I had seen on various trips abroad. Further down the road to Beograd, I also saw my first Yugoslavian amphibians, Fire-bellied Toads, *Bombina bombina*, and Marsh Frogs, *Rana ridibunda*, in a man-made pool along the roadside.

The next day, just before we reached the Greek border, at the town of Gevgelija, we suffered a major mechanical breakdown and as we had to wait for new parts for a day, I decided to spend the time searching the surrounding hillsides. As I walked along the edge of the road, a Montpellier Snake, *Malpolon monspessulanus*, easily identified by its piercing expression, disappeared into a hole in a bank. Two or three Tortoises, *Testudo hermanni*, were also seen here and a couple more were sadly found dead on the road, but in spite of these casualties, they were extremely abundant in the scrub further up the hillside. In the space of an hour or so, I saw perhaps sixty or seventy Tortoises of varying sizes, which convinced me that the loss of a few road casualties had probably had not too bad an effect on the Tortoise population as a whole. Many of the ones that I found were near shallow scrapes in the earth, but I do not know whether these scrapes were where they rested at night, or where they had hibernated throughout the previous winter. Green Lizards, *Lacerta viridis*, were fairly common in this area, and a large Whip-snake, *Coluber jugularis caspius*, narrowly evaded capture in the long grass.

Having repaired the van, early the next day we set off on the road again and by mid-afternoon we had arrived at our final destination, a small peninsula in North-east Greece, situated in the province of Chalcidiki, South-east of Thessaloniki. Our first camping-place was a small sheltered cove at the base of a cliff and accessible only from one winding dirt-track along which it was impossible to drive the van. The sea was a glorious blue and the sun blazed down on the sandy beach. As we walked along the track, we watched a large school of dolphins chasing a shoal of fish across the bay and a Kestrel flew from its nest on the only tree on the beach. Green Lizards and Wall Lizards, *Podarcis sp.* scurried into the bushes.

After a day of relaxation, early in the morning on June 3rd, I headed back up the road to a slow-moving river that we had passed the day before. As I approached the river-bank, I was surprised to see a gravid female Green Lizard laying submerged in the water with just its head protruding above the surface. Though I had not witnessed this phenomenon before, two more females were observed in the same position that morning and I wondered if males used the same method of temperature regulation, though none were seen. As I waded up the river, I caught or observed Marsh Frogs, Yellow-bellied Toads, *Bombina variegata*, Striped-necked Terrapins, *Mauremys caspica*, Pond Turtles, *Emys orbicularis*, Dice Snakes, *Natrix tessellata* and one Grass Snake, *Natrix n. persa*. The Turtles were captured as they walked along the river-bed and picking them up proved to be quite an unpleasant task as they invariably discharged a foul-smelling defence odour.

It was with a feeling of immense satisfaction that I strolled back down the track to our

camp that evening and to round the day off nicely, I caught three more species — a Slow-worm, *Anguis fragilis*, an Agile Frog, *Rana dalmatia*, and lastly, an attractively marked Green Toad, *Bufo viridis*, all of them obviously enjoying the cooler evening air.

A couple of days later, on June 5th, we moved camp to a more accessible beach further along the peninsula, near the village of Sarti. Three Montpellier Snakes were found dead on the road between the two sites and as we drove back from the village at about 11 pm the same evening, a Cat Snake, *Telescopus fallax*, was caught crossing the narrow track.

Over the next few days I spent many hours scouring the surrounding hillsides in search of various reptiles and in addition to the species that I had already caught, four more were added to the list of captures. A gravid female large Whip-Snake, which subsequently laid eight eggs, was trapped on the edge of a lagoon near the beach; three Blind Snakes, *Typhlops vermicularis*, were found under a boulder in a rocky area on the edge of a wood; a Glass Lizard, *Ophisaurus apodus*, was caught in some long grass, and finally, shortly before we left Greece, a Javelin Sand Boa, *Eryx jaculus*, was brought to me by one of the locals.

During the course of my searching, many snakes evaded capture and therefore could not be positively identified, but owing to the speed with which they moved and the uniform colouration of their bodies, it is probable that most of them were either large Whip-Snakes or Montpelliers. No Ratsnakes, *Elaphe*, or evidence of them such as sloughs etc. were seen or found and if they do occur in this area, as the temperature was constantly in the 80s, I think it highly likely that they are most active in the cooler months of the year, when competition for food with the fast-moving diurnal snakes is not so fierce.

Summary of reptiles and amphibians caught by the author in North-east Greece in June, 1979.

<i>Anura</i>	<i>Testudines</i>	<i>Malpolon monspessulanus</i>
<i>Bufo viridis</i>	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>	<i>insignitus</i>
<i>Bombina variegata</i>	<i>Mauremys caspica</i>	<i>Telescopus f. fallax</i>
<i>Rana ridibunda</i>	<i>Testudo hermanni</i>	
<i>Rana dalmatia</i>	<i>Ophidia</i>	
<i>Sauria</i>	<i>Eryx jaculus</i>	
<i>Podarcis sp.</i>	<i>Typhlops vermicularis</i>	
<i>Lacerta viridis</i>	<i>Coluber jugularis caspius</i>	
<i>Anguis fragilis</i>	<i>Natrix n. persa</i>	
<i>Ophisaurus apodus</i>	<i>Natrix tessellata</i>	

References

- Arnold, E.N. and Burton J.A. (1978). A Field Guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of Britain and Europe. Collins, London.
- Clark, R.J. (1968). A collection of Snakes from Greece. Brit. Jour. Herp. Vol 4. No. 3, pp 45-58.
- Steward, J.W. (1971). The Snakes of Europe. David Charles, Newton Abbot.