
Notes on reptiles inhabiting a secondary, post development habitat, south Paphos, west Cyprus

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IN April 1989 I visited southeast Cyprus and reported on the herpetofauna observed, noticing that some reptile species were more abundant in degraded habitats adjacent to new housing developments (Bowles, 1989). This current report comments on reptiles observed on a visit to Paphos, west Cyprus from 7-14 April 2010.

The first week was cool with both wind and rain, but the second week had more sunshine, with temperatures reaching up to 24°C.

The accommodation I used was in the third last of a string of hotels ranging south along the coastline from the town Paphos. Between the accommodation and the next hotel to its south was an area of degraded Mediterranean scrubland that spread west to the coast and east to the main road and immediately in front of the hotels (Fig. 1).

Despite the constant movement of various vehicles and motorcycles, large numbers of holiday makers, and locals with their dogs, seven species of reptile were found within 300 m of the hotel. Of these, only four were found in East Cyprus during the 1989 visit (Bowles, 1989).

SPECIES LIST

Gekkonidae

Cyrtopodion kotschy (Fig. 2)

This small gecko, previously reported from Bowles (1989), with its clawed toes, and characteristic dorsal markings, was seen at night, under lamp-light on a low wall dividing the hotel garden from the seashore. Away from the hotel, it was also found during the day under pieces of wood lying on the ground of the yard of a deserted mill approximately 700 m west of the hotel. Here I encountered one normally marked adult and two black juveniles. We also found an adult basking in the knoll of a severely pruned olive tree in the same vicinity.

Agamidae

Laudakia stellio cypriaca (Fig. 3)

As in eastern Cyprus, this species was very abundant on most piles of big stones, even within the densely populated hotel gardens. The choice habitat for *L. s. cypriaca* was on scrubland, nearer the beach, on the foundations of long-destroyed buildings. Here, dominant males bobbed their heads rapidly as they postured on the highest point of their territory. If one responded to their head bobbing by doing it oneself (an activity best done unobserved by the more conventional holiday makers!), the lizard would at first rapidly respond, then, when fearing it would no longer stand its ground, would speedily run with its tail held in an upturned curve, in a semi-circle round the site, to alight on stones about 7 m distant.

Lacertidae

Acanthodactylus schreiberi

As observed in eastern Cyprus, this spiny footed lizard was seen to be progressively more abundant towards the sandy coastline. Unlike eastern Cyprus, where there were many large, virtually unmarked adults, all the animals seen here were sub-adults, with striped bodies, and, in many cases, red tails. Again, as in the east, their existence is threatened by motor-bikes, mountain bikes, and other types of vehicle.

Phoenicolacerta troodica (Fig. 4)

This handsome lacertid, superficially resembling a race of relatively unmarked *Podarcis muralis* with olive-green backed males, was very common on the stone borders of flower-beds and found well within the hotel garden amidst throngs of supine sun-worshippers. Unlike the very timid spiny-footed lizards, they were quite unconcerned by the proximity of human beings, and could be approached very closely and photographed at leisure. They were only observed near human



Figure 1. Degraded secondary habitat hosting reptiles.



Figure 2. *Cyrtopodion kotschy*.



Figure 3. *Laudakia stellio cyriaca*.

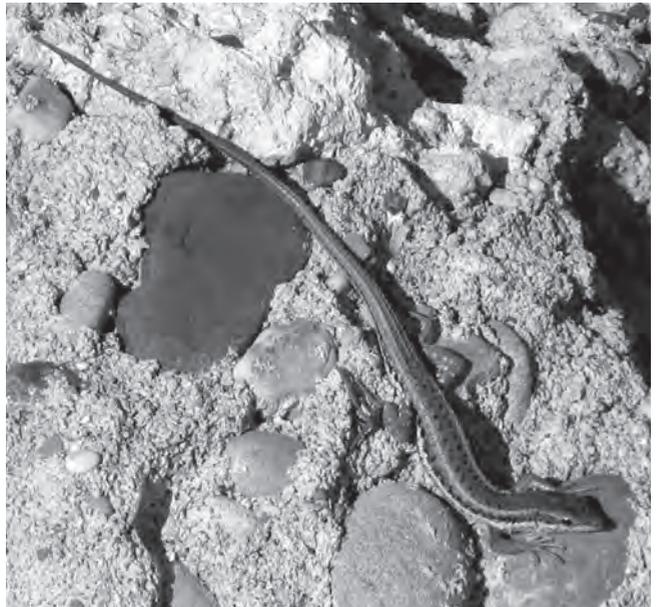


Figure 5. *Ophisops elegans*.



Figure 4. *Phoenicolacerta troodica*.

habitation; none being seen in the scrubland or cultivated countryside.

Ophisops elegans (Fig. 5)

This elegant little lizard with its lidless eyes, was ubiquitous in all areas of the scrubland where there was adequate ground cover. Strangely, unlike those seen in eastern Cyprus, the males lacked the turquoise pigmentation along their flanks. Whether this was due to the relatively cold weather inhibiting mating, or whether they were a morphologically different race, is unsure. This lizard was seen sharing basking sites with banded skinks (*Trachylepis vittata*).

Scincidae

Trachylepis vittata

Unlike eastern Cyprus, where the skink species observed was the snake-eyed skink *Ablepharus budaki*, the animal seen here was the much bulkier, interestingly marked banded skink *Trachylepis vittata*. This species was observed in scrubland, on well vegetated rubble on the southern side of a cleared area adjacent to a main road. It could be watched in the very late afternoons, but was extremely timid and had to be approached with considerable care. The only other habitat that we saw this lizard was on the side of a tree-lined road boarding rough pasture, where it basked on pieces of dead trees, which had been used to enclose the ground.

Colubridae

Dolichophis jugularis

In Cyprus this large whip snake grows to 2.5 m and becomes black, with the exception of the underside of the brownish jaw. Two clear sightings of this snake were seen. A 1.5 m specimen was seen crossing a path just outside the hotel. The second specimen, of a similar size, was disturbed on the hotel refuse pile. It was coiled up, basking and near enough to be observed accurately, even though it quickly retreated at considerable speed.

DISCUSSION

Unlike the flatter countryside of southeast Cyprus, Paphos lies at the western foothills of the Troodos

Mountains, which might explain the presence of *Phoenicolacerta troodos*. Although we made intensive searches in those areas of the surrounding countryside accessible to pedestrians no other species of reptile was seen, nor any amphibians. We also made two visits to an archaeological site near Paphos Harbour, where the splendid classical remains lie distributed across a very large area of prime habitat. Several years ago a colleague of ours saw a basking levantine viper (*Macrovipera lebetina*), but despite reasonably good weather conditions on both visits, we saw no other reptile species than those lizards present on the littoral scrubland adjacent to the hotel.

Like so much of the Mediterranean coast of Cyprus, and its immediate hinterland, Paphos exhibits some sprawling building developments. Some of these developments stretch out of Paphos and are actually pushing up into the Troodos foothills, causing considerable reduction and degradation of the environment. The littoral scrublands, like our Dorset heaths, are seen as prime building land. Their final loss could possibly result in the disappearance of several reptile species. Therefore it behoves the Cyprus government to legislate for their protection and the wide variety of fauna and flora that the habitat supports.

FURTHER READING

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