NEW RECORD OF *PELOBATES VARALDII* IN THE REGION OF BEN SLIMANE (NORTHERN MOROCCO) The family Pelobatidae comprises four species distributed in the western Palaearctic region (Amphibiaweb, 2012). Only one species, *Pelobates varaldii*, is present in North Africa, where it is endemic to the coastal plains of northern Morocco (Salvador, 1996). Its distribution is limited to the region between Tangiers to the north, Oualidia to the south, and Ouezzane to the east (de Pous et al., 2012) (Fig.1). This species is threatened by habitat destruction and the recent introduction of exotic fishes (for example, *Gambusia* and *Lepomis* species; García et al., 2010) and for this reason *P. varaldii* is classified as endangered in the IUCN Red List categories (Salvador et al., 2012). Recently, the distribution and the regional niche occupied by this species have been revised (de Pous et al., 2012). These authors were unable to confirm the presence of this species in the region of Ben Slimane, and considered this region unsuitable for *P. varaldii,* specifically due to the absence of sandy soils and the prevalence of "thick bushy undergrowth" (de Pous et al., 2012). In March 2013 we discovered a new population of *P. varaldii* in the Ben Slimane region, at coordinates 33.69 ° N, 7.15º W (Fig.1). A tadpole (Fig. 2) was found in a temporary pond, along with two other species of amphibians: *Hyla meridionalis* and *Pleurodeles waltl*. The distinctive traits of the *P. varaldii* tadpole were identified following Schleich et al. (1996). This pond had a surface area of 2,530 m² and an average depth of 26 cm. The surroundings were agricultural fields with some remnants of natural vegetation (mainly shrubs of dwarf fan palm *Chamareops humilis*) (Fig. 3), on a sandstone/schistous substrate (Grillas et al., 2004).

Our finding confirms that *P. varaldii* occurs in absence of sandy soils, contrary to assertion of de Pous et al. (2012). In this sense, the sister species *P. cultripes* is also not limited to sandy soils (García-París et al., 2004), although it favours this type of substrate (Tejedo & Reques, 2002). *P. varaldii* is likely to be scarce in the region, given that it was only found at a single pond out of 21 ponds surveyed, in the Ben Slimane area. The existence of previous records both south and north of the discovered locality (Fig.1), suggested that this population would be part of a continuous range that would extend until recently through northern Morocco's Atlantic coastal plain. It is unlikely that it is result of an introduction, since this species has no value for the local people. The discovery of this new population indicates that small isolated populations can survive in the area surrounding Ben Slimane, (although they might be difficult

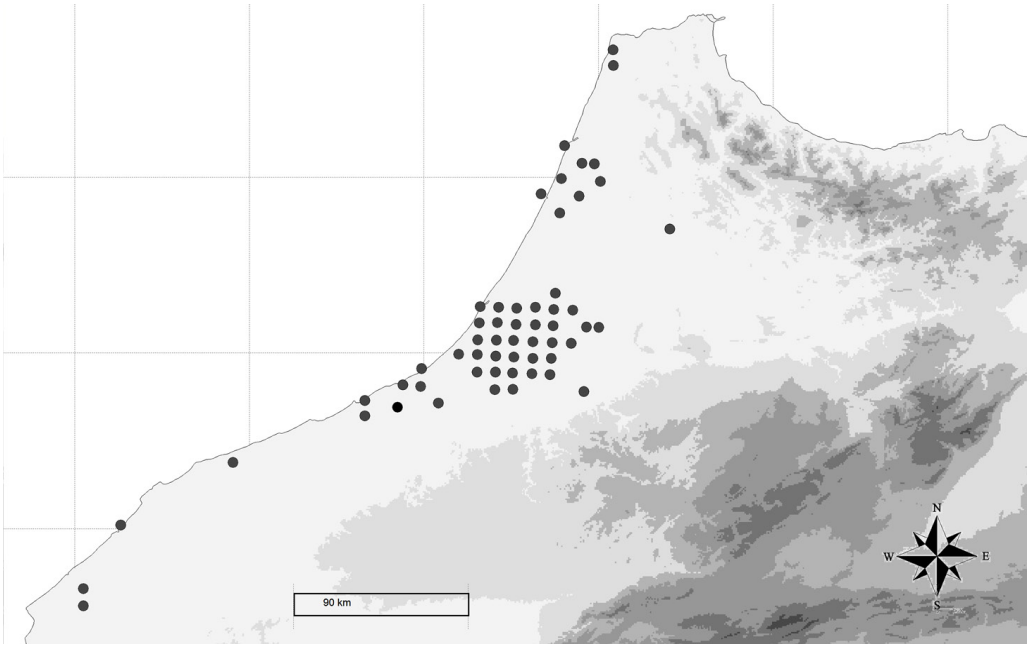

Figure 1. Distribution of *P. varaldii* in Morocco according to de Pous et al. (2012):grey circles. The new location described in this article is shown in a black circle.

Figure 2. Photograph of the tadpole of *P. varaldii* captured in the Ben Slimane area, March 2013.

Figure 3. Temporary pond on sandstone/schistous substrate. Breeding habitat of *P. varaldii*, *H. meridionalis* and *P. waltl*.

to detect), and that they are possibly very vulnerable to extinction.

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