

NOTES ON REPTILES IN CYPRUS

MICHAEL LAMBERT

(Chairman, BHS)

In an earlier account, Demetropoulos & Lambert (1986) commented on the relative lack of work, somewhat surprisingly, that had been carried out on the herpetofauna of Cyprus (a member of the commonwealth since 1960). During a further visit between 11 and 16 November 1986 upon returning from Tanzania, I took the opportunity to make a few further, rather desultory observations on the few reptiles seen at this late time of year. These follow, with BM(NH) accession numbers in parentheses for those specimens collected.

Tröodos range:

Arriving at Larnaca airport (after an 11 hour stop-over in Jeddah) on 11 November and continuing to Nicosia the next day, I departed for the Tröodos the following afternoon. The bus started to climb steeply up the Marathasa valley on the northern slopes of the Tröodos range and shortly proceeded through the villages of Kalopanyiotis (732 m), Moutoullas (762 m) and Pendhoullas (1128 m). Surrounded by forests of Aleppo pine (*Pinus brutia*) and the Cypriot endemic golden oak (*Quercus alnifolia*), the bus finally reached Prodromos, the highest village in Cyprus (1402 m). Based at the Forestry College (1417 m), I accompanied the Principal, George Pattichis, on his rounds the next morning (14.xi) to oversee students carrying out forestry maintenance work as part of their training. The sky was crystal clear and the sun brilliant, but the air was cool for above 1500 m; the mountains had received their first fall of winter snow during the week before. Not unexpectedly, few reptiles were seen.

Ophisops elegans. A single half-grown lizard of this species (collected previously by Werner (1936) and Clark (1973) in the Tröodos) was collected (BM 1987:938) from bulldozer-exposed ground near the summit of a forest-cleared peak at about 1000 m, approximately 13 km east of Kalopanyiotis.

Agama stellio. Three actively-running adults were seen on the sides and the dirt surface of a small track passing through pine forest to the west of the main road between Kalopanyiotis and Moutoullas.

Paphos:

Departing Prodromos by the road to Tröodos (1676 m) with light snow on the hillsides and edge of the road by Mt. Khionistra (Olympus) (1951 m), one can proceed down the southern slopes of the Tröodos range through Pano Platres (1128 m) to Limassol on the coast and thence west to Kato Paphos. At Paphos harbour, the Department of Fisheries of Cyprus's Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources has a wet laboratory where a marine turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) breeding project is based (Demetropoulos & Lambert, 1986). Through an introduction from Andreas Demetropoulos, Head of the Department of Fisheries, whom I had seen in Nicosia earlier in the week, and was responsible for initiating the project, the officer-in-charge, Mr. Andreas Pistentis, kindly showed me his breeding laboratory (16.xi). There were three large cylindrical tanks of galvanised iron where the hatchling green turtles were being reared (Plate 1) after emerging from eggs incubated in the laboratory. After a year, the turtles are transferred to rearing pens in the middle of Paphos harbour (Plate 2) to ongrow them and give them a "head-start" prior to release.

Behind Paphos harbour, there is dry, somewhat disturbed habitat in an area with many rocks on the ground and dry scrub vegetation (Plate 3). Turning over a number of rocks revealed two reptiles species (16.xi).

Ablepharus kitaibeli. Two of these small skinks (not *A. pannonicus* as listed by Boulenger (1910)) were exposed under a rock (one collected - BM 1987: 939) and another a little later. It is a Near Eastern/SW European species.

Hemidactylus turcicus. An adult and half-grown individuals were found under a rock (one collected - BM 1987: 937) and the following morning (17.xi), two further adults were found.

The species is distributed throughout Mediterranean coasts and islands.

The weather was warm with diffuse sunshine, but no *Vipera lebetina* were seen. It is very common near Paphos (A. Demetropoulos, pers. comm.).

Proceeding 2 km east from Paphos harbour and past an industrial area making up the Sodap Wine Factory, the primarily rocky coast has intermittent small sandy inlets. At the back of one of these coves thus formed, there was a small area of dunes with occasional thorny bushes. A pause of five minutes near one of these small bush clumps revealed another lizard species active in the warm, hazy sunshine at ca. 18° C air temperature (17.xi).

Acanthodactylus schreiberi. Two adults and about five immature individuals of almost certainly this species darted between bushes, occasionally entering burrows, using their fringe-toed feet to race across loose sand. With fawn-grey dorsal surfaces, their tails were bright orange-red. Clark (1973) collected 88 specimens of this species when he was in Cyprus and indicated that it was numerous in certain coastal sandy areas near Kyrenia and Galanoupetra Point in the north of the island. Despite Werner (1936) collecting the species near Platres at over 1150 m in the Tröodos range, Clark was convinced that the species is principally an inhabitant of sand dunes and dry plains at low altitudes.

Ophisops elegans. Three small lizards, probably this species (Clark (1973) collected 38) if not *Lacerta laevis* (of which Clark (1973) also collected a large number - 77), were seen running over an area of dry rocky ground amidst thin vegetation making up a disturbed habitat on a low coastal cliff (17.xi) within the proximity of Paphos's coastal development.

On the final return journey, the service taxi passed through a dry, hilly area with vineyards near Pissouri, by a game reserve within the Episkopi Garrison area and by Kolossi Castle en route for Limassol, before continuing through more dry, hilly country with olive groves to reach Larnaca airport once again.

REFERENCES

- Boulenger, G.C. (1910). A list of the reptiles and batrachians of Cyprus. *Bulletin of the Cyprus Natural History Society* No. 1, 1-3.
- Clark, R.J. (1973). Report on a collection of reptiles from Cyprus. *British Journal of Herpetology* 5, 357-360
- Demetropoulos, A. & Lambert, M. (1986). Herpetology in Cyprus. *British Herpetologica Society Bulletin* No. 17, 22-23, 26-27.
- Werner, F. (1936). Reptiles from Mount Tröodos. *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* 1936, 655-658.



Plate 1. Green turtle hatchlings in rearing tank of the Department of Fisheries' wet laboratory, Paphos (16.xi). The water flowing into the tank (left) maintains aerated conditions.

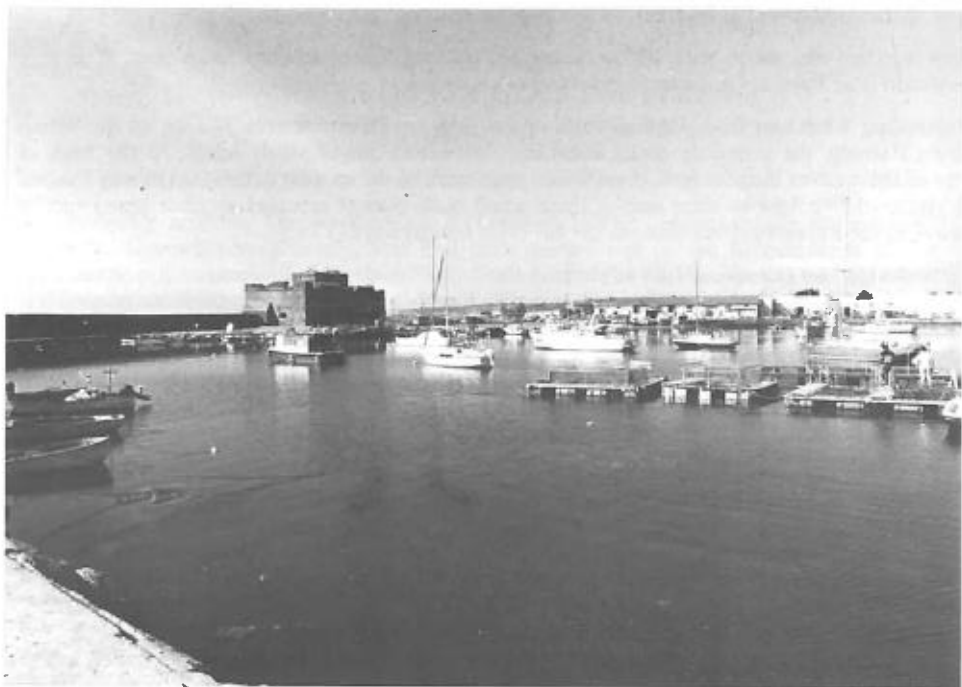


Plate 2. Paphos harbour with castle (left) and the three floating turtle on-growing cages (right foreground). The open entrance of the wet laboratory is the one on the right in the long, pale-roofed building behind the harbour on the right.



Plate 3. Dry habitat behind the castle on the harbour looking north-east towards Paphos (17.xi). *Ablepharus kitaibeli* and *Hemidactylus turcicus* were found under rocks (see text).

AMENDMENTS TO "NOTES ON REPTILES IN CYPRUS"

MICHAEL LAMBERT

Chairman, BHS

Since submitting an earlier note to press (Lambert, 1987), further publications on the amphibia and reptiles of Cyprus have come to my attention.

Boulenger's (1910) list of species has been published elsewhere (Bucknill & Boulenger, 1913) in a more widely distributed work. Birkenmaier (1953) is another recorder of herpetofauna in Cyprus and Börner (1974) has also made some observations in winter (December-January) on the lizards while based at Varosha, a suburb on the south side of Famagusta (now inside Turkish occupied territory).

The common lizard species in Cyprus, *Ophisops elegans*, known in Europe by the name of snake-eyed lizard, is also wide-spread and abundant in Mediterranean coastal Turkey, preferring dry habitat conditions (Lambert, 1970).

The starred agama, *Stellio (Agama) stellio*, known in Israel also by the name of hardûn, is widespread in SW Asia.

Ablepharus kitaibelii, also known as snake-eyed skink, which was found sympatrically with *Hemidactylus turcicus* under rocks behind the harbour in Paphos, was also reported from Paphos, together with *Acanthodactylus schreiberi*, in a collection examined by Knoepffler (1963).

REFERENCES

- Birkenmaier, E. (1953). Herpetologische Notizen von der Insel Cypern. *Aquarien - und Terrarien - Zeitschrift*, 6, 18-22.
- Börner, A.-R. (1974). Notes on the Cyprus lizard fauna. *Miscellaneous Articles in Saurology* No. 11, 5-20, Köln, published by the author.
- Boulenger, G.A. (1910). A list of the reptiles and batrachians of Cyprus. *Bulletin of the Cyprus Natural History Society* No. 1, 1-3.
- Bucknill, J.A.S. and Boulenger, G.A. (1913). Reptilia and batrachians. In *The handbook of Cyprus*, 7th issue. London, Lukach, H.C. and Jardine, D.J.
- Knoepffler, L.-P. (1963). Reptiles récoltés à Chypre par MM. Monniot et Biguet. *Vie et Milieu* 14, 843-846.
- Lambert, M.R.K. (1970). Notes on a collection and observations of amphibians and reptiles from S.W. Turkey. *British Journal of Herpetology* 4, 129-134.
- Lambert, M. (1987). Notes on reptiles in Cyprus. *British Herpetological Society Bulletin* No. 21(22), 26-28.