

NOTES ON THE HERPETOFAUNA OF ASTIPALAIA ISLAND (DODECANESE, GREECE)

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Amphibians and Reptiles of the Aegean Islands are far from being well known, although several researches have been carried out on these vertebrates during the past two decades (e.g. Pieper, 1970; Gruber and Schultze-Westrum, 1971; Lieftinck, 1974; Gruber and Fuchs, 1977; Broggi, 1978; Frör and Beutler, 1978; Beutler, 1979; Beutler and Frör, 1980; Schneider, 1983; Grillitsch and Tiedemann, 1984; Cattaneo, 1989).

In particular, some major biogeographic and faunistic questions still exist for a number of Aegean Islands in which only partial researches, if some, were carried out. This is also the case of Astipálaia Island, which is one of the less well known Aegean Islands as far as the herpetofauna is concerned. The only contributions in which data on the herpetofauna of this island are quoted are those by Zavattari (1929), Wettstein (1937, 1953), and Beutler and Gruber (1977). Things being as they are, we were stimulated to study the Amphibian and Reptile fauna of this island. Our researches were carried out in September 1988 and in June and August 1990.

Astipálaia Island lies between 36° 31' and 36° 39' N and 26° 14' and 26° 30' long. E. Although it is administratively assigned to the Dodecanese Archipelago, this island belongs geographically to the Cyclades Archipelago (Fig. 1).

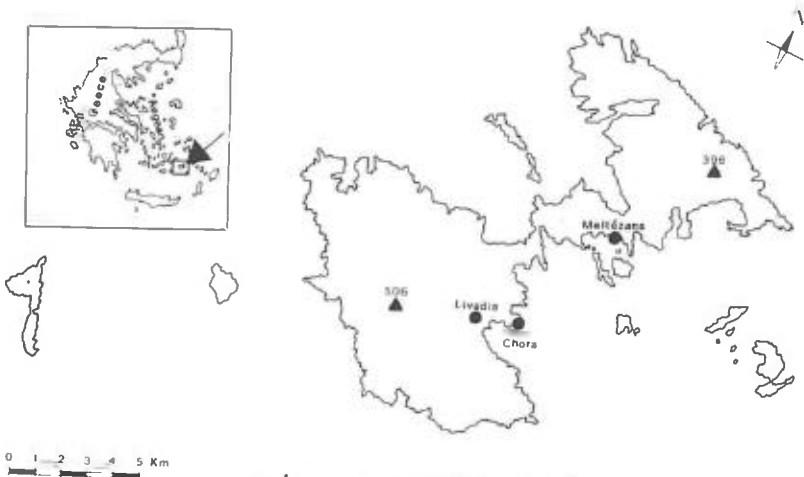


Fig. 1. Map of Astipálaia Island.

The annual rainfall is relatively low (about 500 mm, according to Martelli, 1913a, b), but in some valleys springs and perennial streams exist. The vegetation is characterized by garigue with spiny shrubs (Plate 1). According to Beguinot and Vaccari (1912) and Martelli (1913b), the most important and widespread botanical species are: *Poterium spinosum*, *Juniperus phoenicea*, *Euphorbia dendroides*, *Pistacia lentiscus*, *Genista acanthoclados*, *Calycotome villosa*, *Ramnus oleoides*, *Salvia triloba*, *Brassica adpressa*.

During our researches we have found one species of Amphibian (*Rana ridibunda*) and three terrestrial species of Reptiles (*Hemidactylus turcicus*, *Cyrtodactylus kotschyi*, *Podarcis erhardii*).



Plate 1. Garigue and spiny shrub vegetation on the western side of Astipálaia Island (photo by F.M. Angelici).



Plate 2. A typical nesting site of *Caretta caretta* in a beach of Astipálaia Island (photo by F. Riga).

Two other Reptiles, *Caretta caretta* and *Chelonia mydas*, occur in the marine area of Astipálaia and probably reproduce on the beaches of this island and of some minor satellite islets (Plate 2). Despite our investigations, we were never able to find the lacertid lizard *Ophisops elegans*, which was quoted for the island by Zavattari (1929), though it was not collected by other authors afterwards. Moreover, in our study no snake species were recorded, to further confirm the observations of the preceding authors.

Rana ridibunda occurs only in two streamlets sited on the western side of the island. In both these sites tadpoles (in June and in August), as well as adults, were observed. The species was already quoted for Astipálaia by Lanza and Vanni (1988). *Podarcis erhardii* is widespread and numerically abundant on the island, occurring in anthropized areas as well as in natural biotopes. As to the Gekkonids, *Hemidactylus turcicus* was observed and collected only in the vicinities of human buildings, while *Cyrtodactylus kotschy* was observed in several localities either on delapidated walls and buildings or in rocky areas.

The occurrence of the two sea turtle species would suggest the preservation of the island's natural environments, especially the coastal ones.

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