

## A SHORT NOTE ON THE HERPETOFAUNA OF GOZO

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Having worked on the herpetofauna of the Maltese Islands for the last four years we note that in the contribution by F.D. Bowles (1988) there were certain inaccuracies and misconceptions, which we should like to rectify by means of this short note.

### AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF THE MALTESE ISLANDS

**Amphibians.** In the Maltese Islands there is only one species of amphibian, the Painted Frog *Discoglossus pictus pictus* which does occur in Gozo. *Bufo viridis* which Bowles mentioned to occur in Malta is not actually present on any island of the Maltese group. Fossil remains of *B. viridis* have been found at Ghar Dalam Cave (Bate, 1935) as well as remains assigned to *Bufo vulgaris* or *Bufo bufo* (Zammit Maempel, 1985). Despott (1913) had introduced specimens of *Bufo viridis* (together with *Bufo vulgaris*, *Bufo calamita*, *Hyla arborea* and *Rana* spp.) into the island but none of these seem to have established breeding populations or have been recorded since.

**Reptiles.** In the Maltese Islands there are the following Squamata:

*Chalcides ocellatus tiligugu* (Gmelin) – Ocellated Skink  
*Hemidactylus turcicus turcicus* (Linnaeus) – Turkish Gecko  
*Tarentola mauritanica* (Linnaeus) – Moorish Gecko  
*Chamaeleo chamaeleon* (Linnaeus) – Mediterranean Chameleon  
*Podarcis filfolensis maltensis* (Mertens) – Maltese Wall Lizard

All of these have been recorded on Gozo.

On the island of Malta there are also four species of Ophidia:

*Coluber viridiflavus carbonarius* Bonaparte (Black Whip Snake) listed in the Red Data Book for the Maltese Islands as locally vulnerable (Lanfranco and Schembri, 1989).  
*Coluber florulentus algirus* (Jan) (Algerian Whip Snake) which is locally vulnerable and has a restricted distribution (Lanfranco and Schembri, 1989).  
*Elaphe situla leopardina* (Bonaparte) (Leopard Snake) which has a restricted Mediterranean distribution and is locally vulnerable (Lanfranco and Schembri, 1989).  
*Telescopus fallax fallax* (Fleischmann) (Cat Snake) which is locally vulnerable and has a restricted distribution (Lanfranco and Schembri, 1989).

Out of these four snakes only *Coluber viridiflavus carbonarius* has been recorded from Gozo where it can be commonly seen late in the afternoon among vegetation and crossing footpaths.

On the island of Malta *Elaphe situla leopardina* seems to be the most common snake (although quantitative studies need to be carried out in this regard) while *Coluber florulentus algirus* and *Telescopus fallax fallax* are very rare and seem to be restricted to the southeastern parts of the island (Lanfranco, 1955).

From Maltese waters there are records of five sea turtle species – *Dermochelys coriacea* (Leatherback Turtle), *Caretta caretta* (Loggerhead Turtle), *Chelonia mydas* (Green Turtle), *Lepidochelys kempfi* (Kemp's Ridley) and *Eretmochelys imbricata* (Hawksbill Turtle), the latter three recorded only from single specimens (Gramentz, 1989). *Caretta caretta* is the most common of the five turtles and is frequently caught and sold by fishermen, even in Gozo, since they are still not legally protected in the Maltese Islands. Despott (1915) records that during Spring large numbers of Loggerhead Turtles appear to lay eggs "on our unfrequented sandy beaches, especially at Gozo". These sandy beaches are no longer unfrequented and sea turtles no longer breed on Gozo.

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