

## SOME NOTES ON THE REPTILE FAUNA OF FOURNOI, IKARIA, AND SCHINOUSSA, AEGEAN SEA, GREECE.

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### INTRODUCTION

A trip to Greece in the early summer of 1995 gave me the opportunity to visit the islands of Fournois, Ikaria and Schinoussa. None of these islands have received much attention from herpetologist and relatively little has been published. This report is basically a summary of my field notes and I am withholding zoo-geographical discussions and topographical descriptions except where these are of direct relevance.

### FOURNOI

This is a small archipelago of several islands which lies between and to the south of Ikaria and Samos. Only two of the group are inhabited; Fourni and Thymaina. Fourni itself is the largest island and it was here that I was based. Though the reptile fauna is related to that of the easternmost Aegean islands and hence to the Turkish mainland it is fairly impoverished. Conditions are dry, there is no surface water and the landscape is barren, almost treeless with scattered pockets of cultivation. Most searching was done from sunrise to around 09.00 hrs under sunny conditions with air shade temperatures between 26°C and 28°C. *Agama stellio daani* was found in small numbers in isolated populations living on stone walls and rocky outcrops. Population density was low as it was for *Tenuidactylus kotschyi beutleri* of which only a few examples were encountered in similar habitats. These were the only lizard species found although *Odphisops elegans macrodactylus* is listed (Ondrias, 1968; Chondropoulos, 1986) as well as *Ablepharus k. kitaibelli* (Wettstein, 1953; Chondropoulos, 1986). One specimen of *Eirenis m. modestus* was found active on a dusty track at around 08.00 hrs. This had a body length of 17 cm, tail 5 cm. What would appear to be the first documented record of *Coluber c. caspius* was made from two examples. One was found badly damaged on a steep path above the port and the other spotted basking on a rock on open hillside at about 09.00 hrs. This fled under some boulders when approached and could not be caught but was estimated at around 120 cm in length. The top of the head was reddish. In view of the wide distribution of this species and its presence on both Samos and Ikaria it was a not unexpected find.

### IKARIA

The island of Ikaria is to be found roughly midway between Myconos (Cyclades) and Samos (Dodecanese). It is mountainous with peaks of over 1000 m and is well vegetated. A notable feature is the presence of abundant streams and small rivers which flow throughout the year. In the neighbourhood of the mountain village of Christoare some lakes, which were not visited, and behind the shoreline swampy areas with deep ponds and pools. In addition to dense bushes and thickets along the stream margins there are conifer forests which have been partly destroyed by recent fires though not as severely as on some of the other Greek islands. Despite the habitat potential Ikaria does not boast

many reptile species though those that occur are quite common with an even distribution throughout the island. Like Fournoi the herpetofauna is of Asia Minor origin though a conspicuous absentee is *Eirenis modestus*. This was my third visit to the island. I am using information gathered in June 1966 and 1984 in addition to that assembled in 1995, June 21 to 24. On both previous occasions investigations were carried out in the vicinity of Agios Kirylos on the south coast and inland up to the central mountain ridge and eastwards to the extremity of the island near to Cape Drepanon. In 1995 I was based at Armenisti on the northside and towards the western end.

*Agama stellio* (Plate 1) was abundant and found not only on walls and rocks but on old buildings and earthy banks. It was active from sunrise through the hottest time of the day but was wary and difficult to approach. Several animals were often seen together.

*Tenuidactylus kotschy* was found sporadically in 1995 but in 1966, June 3 to 7, it was more in evidence. *Ablepharus kitaibelli* was not seen at all in 1995 but three examples were found in 1966 in damp localities near streams and amongst low grassy vegetation.

*Lacerta o. oertzeni* (Plate 2) is also common on Ikaria. This dainty lizard was found along stream gullies where it occupied rocks and boulders as well as roadside embankments and garden walls. It was much less in evidence in open dry countryside and the pine forests. This species was just as common at higher altitudes around 600-700 m as down by the coast.

*O. elegans* (Plate 3) was scarcer and in contrast to *L. oertzeni* preferred dry areas with low but not too dense vegetation, seeking cover around the base of plants and bushes and could occasionally be found on open sandy tracks. Unlike *L. oertzeni* it was a solitary lizard, shy and retiring and had to be looked for carefully.

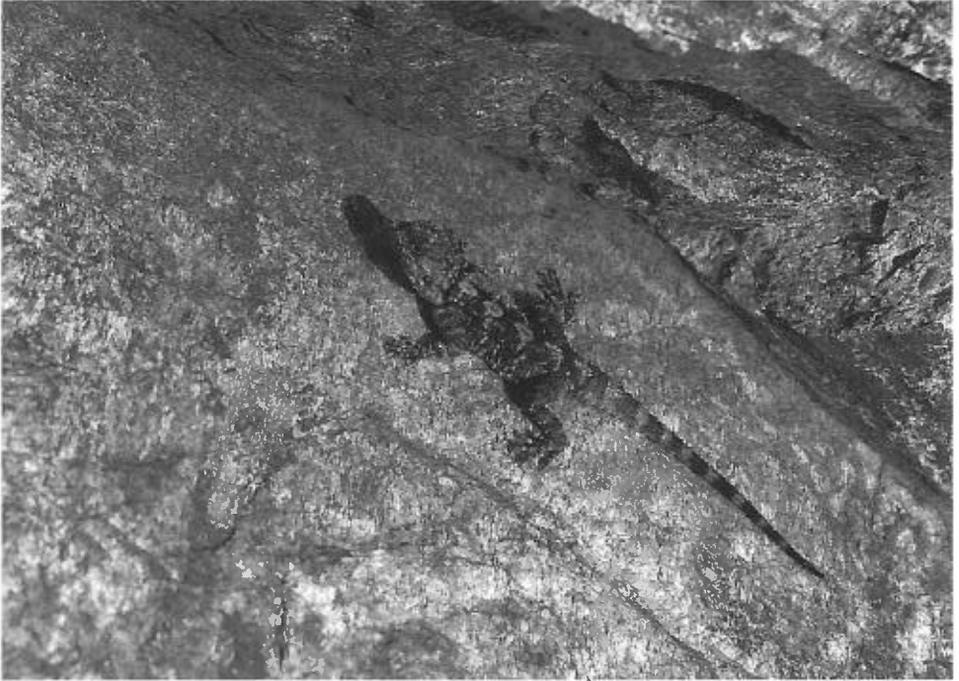
*Coluber caspius* is the only snake species recorded from the island. In 1995 I found evidence of it only from a badly damaged specimen that had been dead a long time, but in 1966 three examples were found, two adults and a juvenile, and in 1984 a sub-adult on the top of the island on a path. From personal experience I would conclude that this snake is not common.

Whether other species exist on Ikaria is difficult to say. From talking to local people in 1966 I was assured that *N. natrix persa* occurred as well as a "viper". The existence of *N. natrix* must remain a possibility but although the streams and ponds were carefully examined I found no evidence to confirm this. If there are vipers on Ikaria then they would probably be *Vipera xanthina* but it is more likely that the snake referred to is *Telescopus fallax*. This species is never easy to find and if rare might well escape detection.

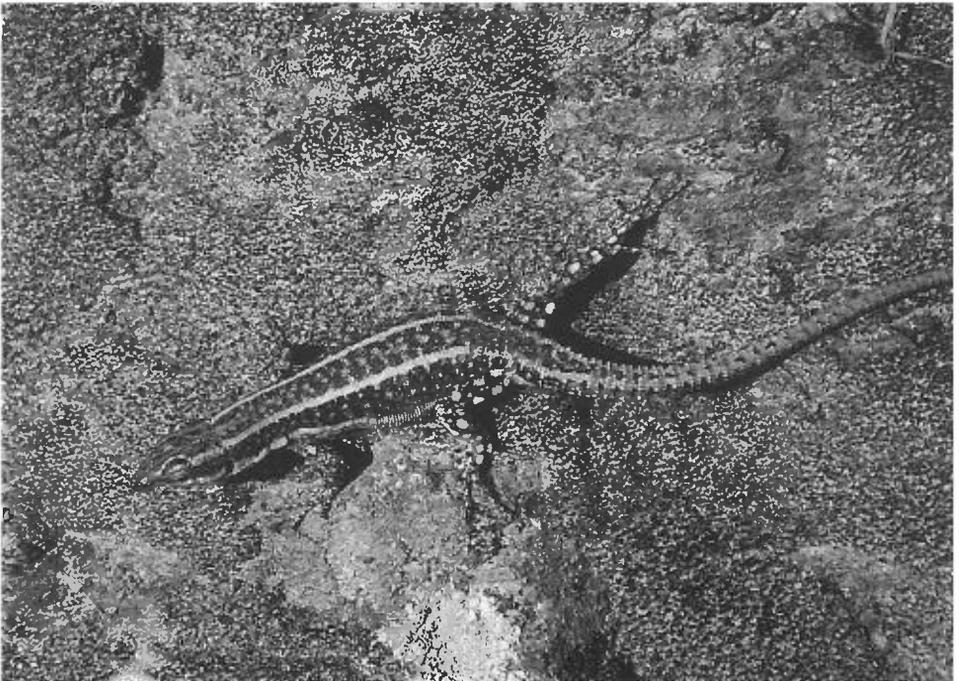
*Mauremys caspica rivulata* was found nearly everywhere. It occurred in large congregations in bodies of water behind the shoreline and in significantly smaller populations in streams. This tendency to prefer still to running water has been noted elsewhere in Greece: Thassos, Samothraki and Lemnos.

## SCHINOUSSA

Schinoussa belongs to a group of small islands off the eastern side of Naxos often referred to as the little Cyclades. Only in recent years have these islands become readily accessible by steamer and even now regular connections operate only in the summer months.



**Plate 1.** *Agama stellio*



**Plate 2.** *Lacerta o. oertzeni*



**Plate 3. *Ophisops elegans***

I had hoped to make a more extensive trip to one or more of these in the Summer of 1995 but connections were made difficult by ferry strikes and then unusually strong winds which meant that only Schinoussa was visited and then for less than 48 hours. Interesting observations were made in 1971 and 1972 by Hans Lotze (Lotze, 1973) amongst which the first record of *Elaphe quatuorlineata muenteri* on Iraklea. In the same paper Lotze postulated that this snake also existed on Schinoussa on the basis of local reports but did not find any evidence of it. David Buttle visited Schinoussa in the latter part of June 1993. Buttle (1993) states that according to information he received the local people are unfamiliar with this species. I was therefore pleased to come across a subadult specimen which had recently been killed. Although the snake had started to decompose I was able to save it by preserving it in two changes of 45% ouzo and then despatching the specimen to Achilles Dimitropoulos at the Goulandris Natural History Museum at Kifissia. The dorsum was grey/brown with cinnamon cross bars and the dark body striping well under development but not continuous. The colouring and markings were similar to those to a subadult female caught on the island Amorgos in April 1993 (Clark, 1994) which measured 70.8 cm total length, 58.5 cm body length. The Schinoussa snake had a total length of 58.5 cm, body length 48.5 cm. Dorsal scalation was 24, 25, 22, ventrals 198, but with the first few uncountable due to damage, making the total count a few scales higher there were 61 paired subcaudals. Schinoussa is an island of 8.83 km<sup>2</sup> with a maximum elevation of 134 m. Walking was easy and being based at the island capital of Kastro I was able to cover most of the island easily in the time at my disposal. Day temperatures were well over 30°C on July 5 and 6. Numerous sheaves of wheat and barley were overturned and searching was also done at night.

*Podarcis erhardii naxensis* and *Tenuidactylus kotschyi* were the only other reptiles found. On the large dune area at Psili Ammos were found snake tracks which presumably had been made by *Eryx jaculus turcicus*. Schinoussa lacks streams or surface water though there are a number of deep wells. Wheat, barley and olives are the main crops and there are broad areas of natural scrub. Many fields are enclosed for the grazing of sheep, goats and cattle. The only other reptile that is known to inhabit Schinoussa is *Hemidactylus t. turcicus*.

## TAXONOMY

In recent years some major changes have been made to reptile nomenclature. The generic, specific and subspecific designations given in this report are largely those that appear in Chondropoulos 1986 and 1989. In my opinion a number of the alterations have been capricious and arbitrary and not least confusing. Since Wettstein wrote his monumentous monograph on Aegean herpetology in 1953, the genus *Gymnodactylus* has been changed to *Cyrtodactylus*, *Tenuidactylus* and *Cyrtopodion*. The purposes that such changes serve seem unclear. I take no sides in the various debates and give the scientific names in accordance with the latest information I have to hand. The reader's attention is drawn to an important work by Eiselt and Schmidtler (1986) on the *Lacerta danfordi* complex which is of relevance concerning the lacertid rock lizards on Ikaria.

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