PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF A COLLECTING TRIP TO ALGERIA — AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

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INTRODUCTION

The Algerian herpetofauna has received little attention, especially during the last decade, (Busack, 1976 and later literature), and so far the parts of North Africa most investigated are Morocco and Tunisia. The main aim of this journey was to make a collection of amphibians and reptiles, which were deposited in the Natural Museum of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kraków. Also some living specimens were brought to Poland for further observations in captive conditions. Besides this, flies from the family *Ceratopogonidae,* scorpions and other invertebrates as well as Lichens were also collected.

Five species of amphibians and twenty eight species of reptiles were recorded during a 40 day journey in north-eastern Algeria in 1981. The trip was undertaken by plane to Alger and then with tents and rucksacks by buses, on foot and occasionally private cars to the Mediterranean Sea coast, Little Kabylie Mountains and Sahara, so collecting was limited. There were special difficulties in the Sahara, where care had to be taken of a few living animals, preserved specimens and photographic equipment (high temperatures and very fine sand), whereas dependence on water restricted free movement (lack of car). Thus the trip should only be regarded as reconnaissance prior to more detailed studies. Nevertheless comparatively good results were possible thanks to the fine cooperation of my friends Jan Ochalski, Dr. Ryszard Szadziewski and Dr. Krzysztof Toborowicz. The following localities were visited (see map):

1. Oued Berd (about 6km S. of Kherrata) in Petite Kabylie — Chaine des Babores at the picturesque flood plain (artificial lake) 11-12 April.
2. About 4km N of Kherrata 12-13 April.
3. Souk el Tenine 13-15 April.
4. Oued Ziama near Ziama Mansouriah 16-18 April.
5. Grarem 18-21 April. The camp was situated on a river bank among bushes of *Nerium oleander* and *Tamarix* sp. (plate 3). Day temperature about 22°C (40°C in sun); at night the temperature fell as low as 8°C. Every evening there were strong rains.
6. Guellal (about 2km S of Sétif) 24 April.
7. About 3km S of Ras Isly (Monts du Hodna) — NE of Magra 24-26 April and 3-4 May. Day temperature about 24°C, evening 12°C, early morning 4°C. Dry mountains (plate 2), rich life, especially in valleys near streams which had not yet dried up.
8. Oasis 33km N. of Biskra 27-28 April. Temperature during day 28-30°C, evening 16°C.
9. 6km S of Biskra 28-29 april. Sandy desert with tussocks of desert grasses and great abundance of roving animals at night.
10. Oumache (32km S of Biskra) 29-30 April.
11. Sowalah (about 10km SE of El Oued) 30 April-2 May. Typical Saharan oasis with date palms. Temperature in shaded tent 40°C, outside about 29°C.
12. Chegga 2-3 May.
13. Sétif 5 May. 1074m above sea level — meadows surrounding town.
14. Aokas 6-8 May.
15. Tichi 8-9 May.
16. Béjaia (2km NW of the town) 9-12 May. Picturesque rocky seacoast with typical mediterranean vegetation (maquis thickets, plate 1) and groups of monkeys, *Macaca sylvanus.* Day temperature about 22°C, night about 12-16°C, temperature on the surface sea water 17°C.
17. Akbou 12-13 May.
18. Surroundings of Tazmalt 13-14 May. Night temperature abut 13°C, day 25-27°C (in sun 47°C.)
19. 13km W of Mansoura 14-15 May.

A LIST OF SPECIES

Amphibians

1. *Pleurodeles poireti* Gervais (plate 4). Localities: 14. Two specimens (♀ — SVL 75 TL 152 and ♂ — SVL 60 TL 115 mm) collected under stones between road and beach in marshy area.
2. *Bufo mauritanicus* Schlegel. Localities: 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 14, 15, 17, 18. Common even in arid region N of Biskra (8) where these toads dug in sand during the day and called very loudly in evening from a shallow stream. Juvenile specimen about 5cm in length found in Aokas and brought to Poland was swallowing newborn mice!
3. *Discoglossus pictus* Otth. Localities, 1, 14. Juveniles were especially common in these localities.
4. *Hyla meridionalis* Boettger. Localities: 14. Only some recently metamorphosed young seen.
5. *Rana ridibunda* Pallas. Localities: 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 14, 17, 18. Very common in almost every locality but desert region. Near Ras Isly frogs called in the morning even when termperature fell to 4°C.

Reptiles

1. *Mauremys caspica leprosa* Schweigger. Localities: 3, 7. Four juveniles caught in Souk el Tenine (plastron length from 26 to 39mm). Near Ras Isly very large specimens observed basking on the bank as well as one young captured.
2. *Testudo graeca graeca* Linnaeus. Localities: 5. One little tortoise only found during the whole stay in Algeria. Such a decrease of population has probably been caused mainly by collection for export to France (Lambert, 1980).
3. *Hemidactylus turcicus* Linnaeus. Localities: 16, 19. Two specimens caught (SVL 42 and 50mm). Near Mansoura these geckos together with *Tarentola mauritanica* were hidden under stones.
4. *Ptyodactylus hasselquisti* Donndorff (plate 5). Localities: 7. Several adults collected on rocks during early morning (SVL 50-59mm).
5. *Stenodactylus stenodactylus mauritanicus* Guichenot (plate 6). Localities: 9. Two specimens preserved (o SVL 46 TL 85 and o SVL 63 TL 113mm). This beautiful gecko is active only at night hunting on dune insects. The female had 2 eggs in her oviducts.
6. *Tarentola mauritanica* Linnaeus (plate 7). Localities: 5, 7, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19. Very common on rocks, fences, under stones, etc. The specimens from Oumache dunes were larger (two specimens preserved — SVL 82 TL 170 and SVL 88mm) and quite possibly they belong to another subspecies (maybe *deserti*?). Also a juvenile individual was captured under date palm leaves in Sowallah (SVL 35 TL 70mm). The largest specimen outside of Sahara measured SVL 71 TL 149mm (18).
7. *Chalcides chalcides* Linnaeus. Localities: 5, 6. Several specimens caught (largest SVL 112mm). Juveniles were common in Guellal by the roadside among pieces of paper, tins, etc.
8. *Chalcides ocellatus tiligugu* Gmelin. Localities: 7, 9, 14, 16, 18. Abundant on the seacoast west of Souk el Tenine, more rare elsewhere. Near Tazmalt one specimen seen when trying to eat a snail crushed by accident with stone. In Aokas these skinks were hiding under pieces of paper, foil bags, rags, etc. A female with complete lack of ocelli was captured near Biskra. This rare phenotype was determined with recently published key (Pasteur 1981, also Pasteur letter communication).
9. *Scincus scincus* Linnaeus. Localities: 11. One specimen caught (SVL 116mm) by local children using a hand-made trap similar to a mousetrap with dried fly as bait. We were told these skinks are "toys" for Arab children.
10. *Chamaeleo chamaeleon* Linnaeus. Localities: 18. One female caught while slowly walking from one bush to another on river bank stones.
11. *Acanthodactylus boskianus asper* Audouin. Localities: 9, 10. Two specimens preserved (SVL 58 TL 165 and SVL 59 TL 165mm). Common near Biskra.
12. *Acanthodactylus inornatus* Gray. Localities: 12. See comments for *A. scutellatus.*
13. *Acanthodactylus pardalis* Lichtenstein. Localities: 13. Two individuals found under stones (SVL 68 and 73mm).

14. *Acanthodactylus savignyi* Audouin. Localities: 3, 5, 7, 14, 17, 18, 19. Abundant in most places visited. The largest specimen from Souk el Tenine measured 182mm (SVL 70mm), smallest 105mm (SVL 40mm). Hatchlings reach SVL 28 TL 65mm.
15. *Acanthodactylus scutellatus* Audouin. Localities: 12. Two distinct forms of *Acanthodactylus* found in Chegga were common. The identification using key of Bons and Girot (1962) as well as letter communication with Pasteur and Bons led to the tentative conclusion that there were two separate species of *Acanthodactylus scutellatus* complex — *A. scutellatus* and *A. inornatus* (temporary I do not consider subspecies level). These extremely fast and agile lizards are ideal for observations. They seem to be very inquisitive, approaching the vicinity of my tweezers or running after a little stone thrown by me, which suggests vital necessity for these lizards to catch every small moving object. Capturing a frightened lizard was, however, almost impossible.
16. *Mesaline guttalata* Lichenstein. Localities: 8. Two specimens seen only (one caught SVL 44 TL 120mm).
17. *Mesaline olivieri* Audouin. Localities: 12, 19. Two specimens collected (largest SVL 46 TL 118mm).
18. *Ophisops occidentalis* Boulanger. Localities: 7. Two specimens only seen and caught (larger measured SVL 43 TL 120mm).
19. *Lacerta lepida pater* Lataste. Localities: 1, 3, 4, 5, 7. Common ashore east of Souk el Tenine, both large adults and juveniles (smallest SVL 57 TL 155mm). Very aggressive lizard, painful bites. The north African subspecies is regarded recently by Bischoff (1982) as valid species *Lacerta pater.*
20. *Podarcis hispanica* Steindachner. Localities: 7. Two specimens collected (larger SVL 46 TL 136mm).
21. *Psammodromus algirus* Linnaeus. Localities: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 14, 16, 17, 18. The most abundant reptile not found only in Sahara. Both juveniles (largely SVL 35 TL 109mm) and adults emitted squeals when handled.
22. *Psammodromus blanci* Lataste. Localities: 13. Two specimens collected (SVL 46mm and SVL 42 TL 123mm). Also squealed when captured.
23. *Coluber hippocrepis* Linnaeus. Localities: 5. One adult specimen captured in the morning in dew grass, another found killed. Very aggressive when photographed evoking fear in faces of some local men observing this enterprise.
24. *Macroprotodon cucullatus* Geoffroy St.-Hilaire. Localities: 6, 16. Two specimens caught, one — from Guellal SVL 323 TL 390mm — was placed in the jar with *Ch. chalcides,* where it swallowed the skink even though it had been disturbed. This specimen, brought to Poland alive, did not want to eat offered lizards of all sizes, but immediately ate a dead *Ch. chalcides.*
25. *Malpolon monspessulanus* Hermann. Localities: 5. One young individual found under the stone.
26. *Natrix maura* Linnaeus (plate 8). Localities: 5, 7, 14, 17, 18. The most common snake. One specimen from Aokas disgorged three little eels in herpetological bag. Collected both juveniles and adults.
27. *Natrix natrix astreptophora* Seoane. Localities: 14. One large adult seen.
28. *Vipera lebetina mauritanica* Gray. Localities: 18. One young individual found under stone and brought to Poland alive. The African subspecies are now sometimes regarded as *Vipera mauritanica mauritanica* and *V.m. deserti.*

Lastly, some words should be added concerning *Uromastyx acanthinurus* and *Varanus griseus.* Though none were seen in the field, stuffed specimens could be bought in every souvenir shop or market. In El Oued I saw a full car with freshly prepared monitors for trade. Surely this cannot be irrelevant to population quantity.

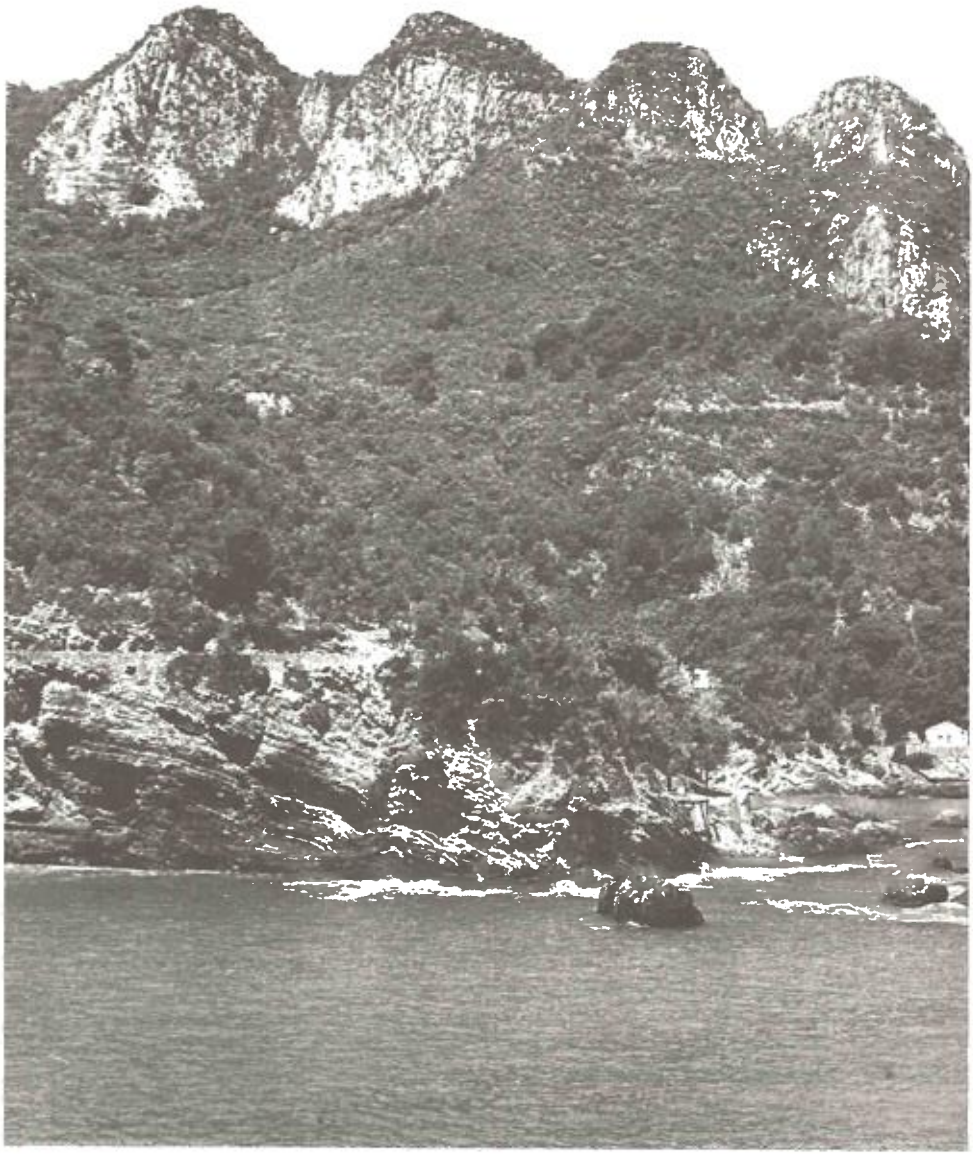

Plate 1. Mediterranean Sea coast near Béjaia.

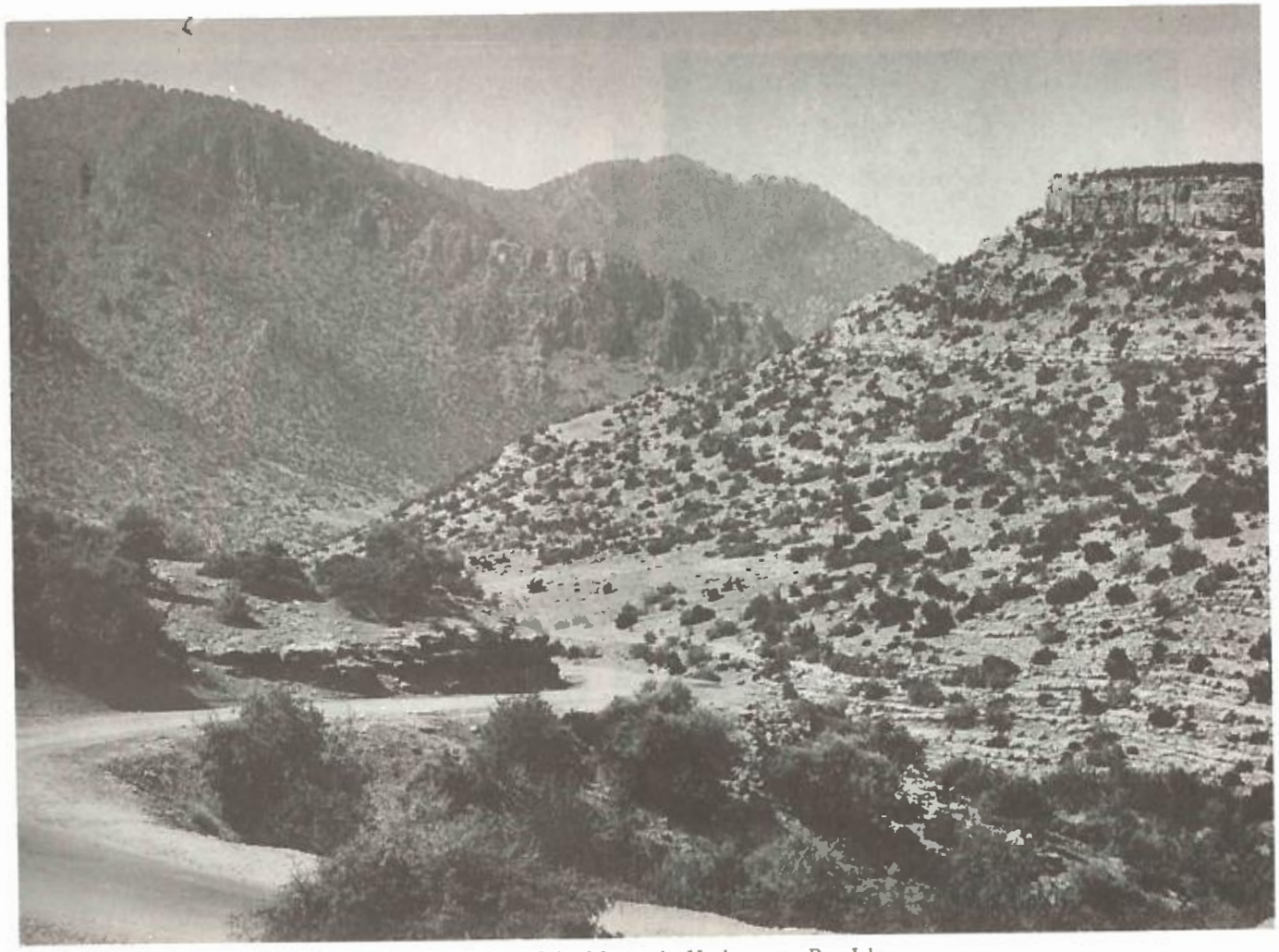

Plate 2. View of the Monts du Hodna near Ras Isly.

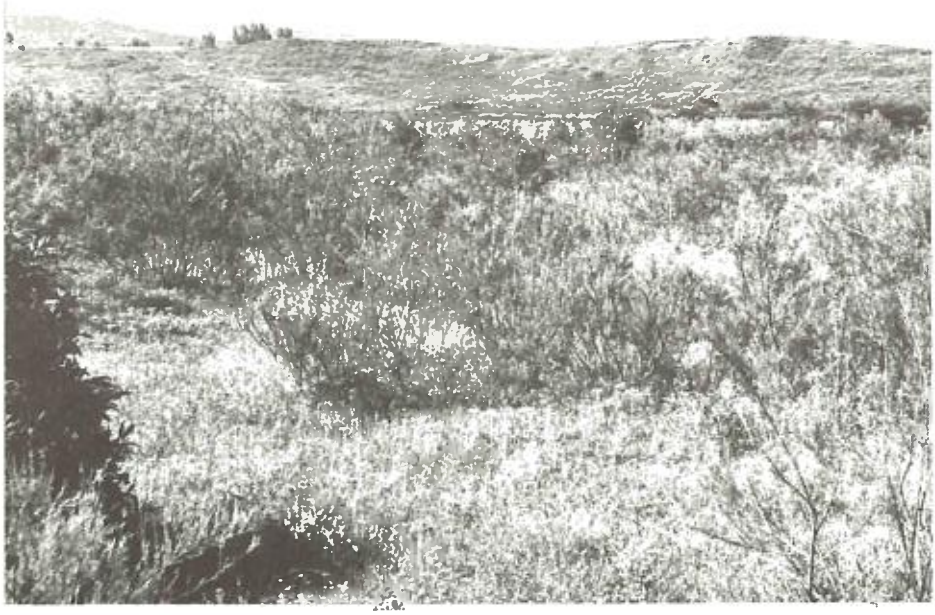

Plate 3. Biotype in the vicinity of Grarem.

Plate 4. A female of *Pleurodeles poireti.*

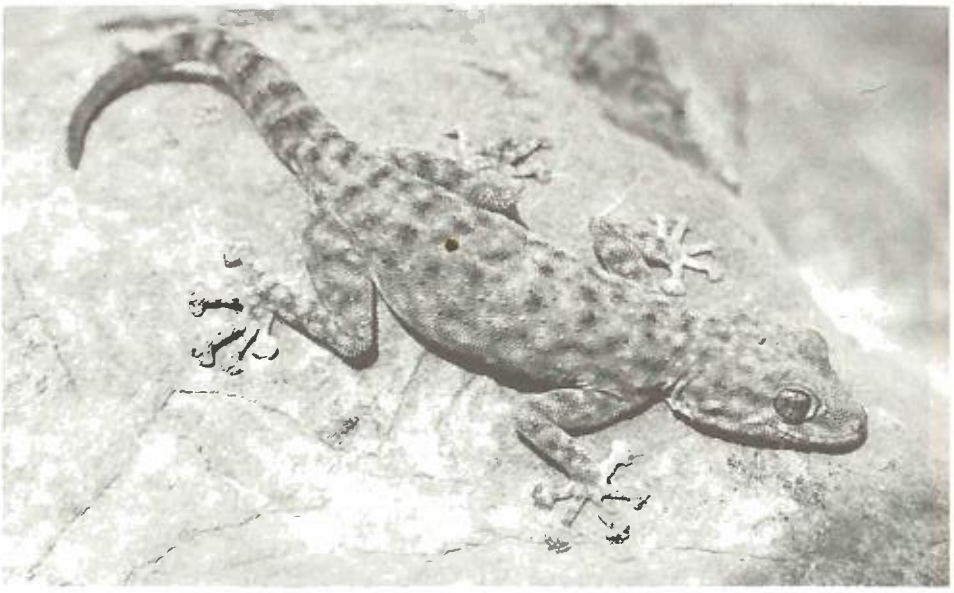

Plate 5. *Ptyodactylus hasselquisti.*

Plate 6. *Stenodactylus stenodactylus mauritanicus.*

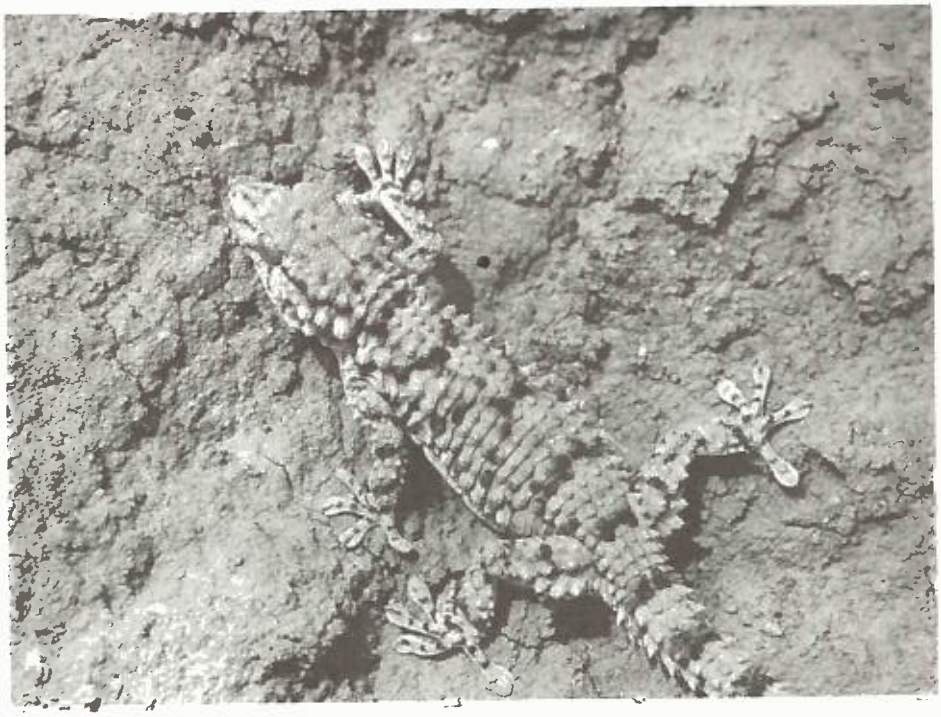

Plate 7. *Tarentola mauritanica* from Oumache.

Plate 8. Juvenile *Natrix maura.*

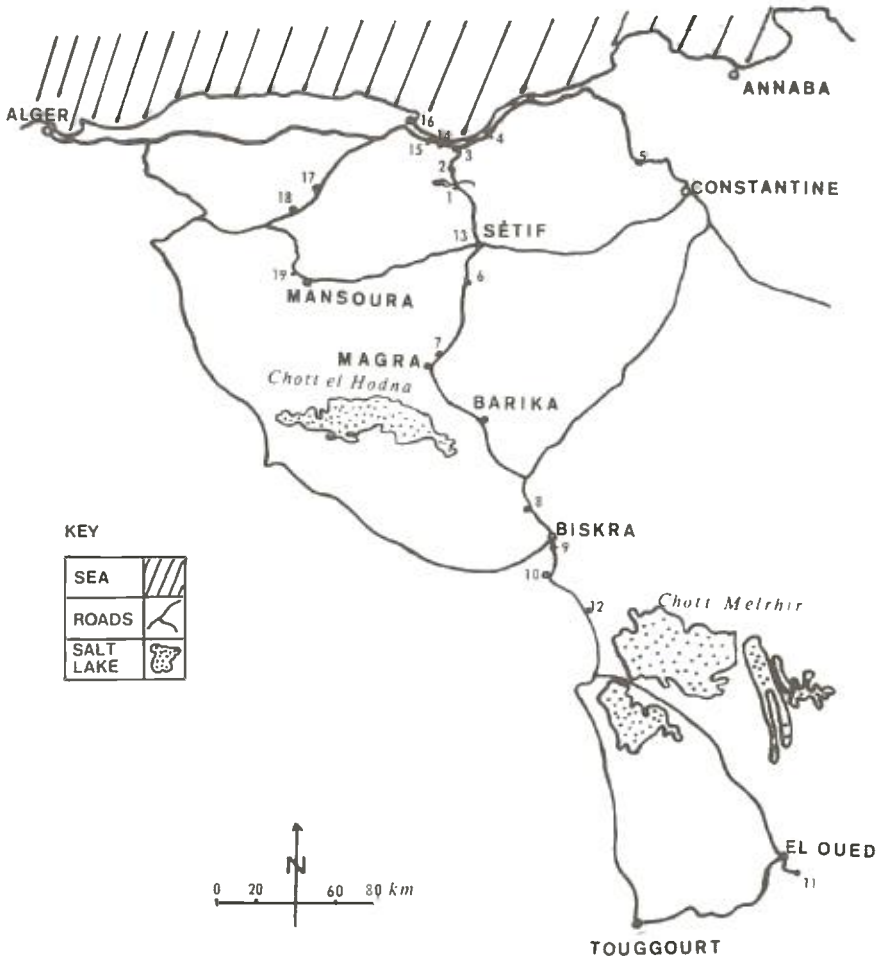

Fig. 1. Map showing localities in north-eastern Algeria visited by the author.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Professors G. Pasteur and J. Bons for their help in some lizard species identification.

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