

HERPETOFAUNA OF THASSOS, NORTH AEGEAN SEA, GREECE

RICHARD CLARK

Vollenetoppen 3, 4800 Arendal, Norway

In a recent paper an account was given of the amphibians and reptiles of Thassos (Clark 1993). Further investigations undertaken by me in June and early October 1997, as well as exchange of correspondence with Kevin Hingley in 1995, indicate the need for a revision. Some former identifications are open to doubt and two further species can be included. There have been no forest fires on Thassos since 1993 and the scars of fire damage in the 1980s have largely healed, partly due to a re-forestation project and the natural reclaiming of burnt areas by secondary growth – bracken and scrub. In 1990 the devastated forests presented a tragic sight.

Part 1 is a result of field work carried out in 1997 and Part 2 a review. The localities mentioned in the text can be located on any good map of Greece.

PART 1

BUFONIDAE

Bufo bufo spinosus Daudin 1803 Common Toad. On June 27th two adult specimens were found dead on the gravel road above the village of Maries. This seems to be the first record from Thassos.

Bufo v. viridis Laurenti, 1768 Green Toad. Several adults in a stream bed at Skala Potamias along with numerous larvae. These were repeatedly seen during the summer visit. Tadpoles were observed feeding on a dead adult. Baby toads were found in roadside ditches and damp areas. In October four adults were found as road casualties.

HYLIDAE

Hyla a. arborea (Linnæus, 1758) Tree Frog. This species was identified from two examples heard calling at Skala Potamias in October.

RANIDAE

Rana dalmatina (Bonaparte, 1840) Agile Frog. The most interesting find in 1997. One specimen was seen in October amongst light undergrowth on the edge of a track at Skala Potamias. The weather had been cooler with rain shortly before my arrival but then turned warmer and drier. Buttler (1989) records it on the nearby mainland.

Rana graeca Boulenger, 1891 Stream Frog. In the summer larvae were found in a mountain stream above Prinos and in roadside ditches in the same region at around 700-800m. Both partly and completely metamorphosed froglets were also seen. A revisit to the same localities in October was negative.

Rana r. ridibunda (Pallas, 1771) Marsh Frog. Not found in the summer but common in October in the river running from Theologos to Potos, both juveniles of the current year and adults, the largest being about 12cm in length. The colouration varied: brown to brilliant green; none had a light vertebral stripe. In a mountain stream one adult was seen which was dull olive in colour with black bars on the limbs and dorsum.

TESTUDINIDAE

Testudo graeca iberica (Linnæus, 1758) Spur-thighed Tortoise. Six adults were found in the summer: three adults on a track between the villages of Panayia and Potamia and two near a river amongst thick vegetation above the village of Maries. At Skala Potamias tortoise tracks were found on the sand dunes behind the beach. One tortoise had heavy tick infestation. None were found in October.

ANGUIDAE

Ophisaurus apodus thracicus (Obst, 1978) Glass Snake. Common in the summer when 12 adults were found, five living, the others either as road casualties or deliberately killed. The largest measured 90 cm in total length but this was the only live example caught. Not found above about 300m altitude.

LACERTIDAE

Lacerta v. viridis (Laurenti, 1768) Green Lizard. Abundant both in the summer and the autumn. In October juveniles greatly exceeded the number of adults. Most young were plain brown though some had a trace of dorso-lateral striping. The adults varied in coloration and markings: males often brilliant green with black stippling, females green, olive, brown or green on the first half of the body, brown on the latter either with or without the dorso-lateral striping. Found in the lowlands and well in to the mountains but generally where there was vegetation and often near water. Open rocky and dry habitats were shunned.

Ophisops elegans macrodactylus (Berthold, 1842) Snake-eyed Lizard. This species was only found in October and then in small numbers. Seven were seen at Alyki, two at Potos and one close to Theologos. This lizard prefers dry, well-exposed sites with broken ground in the vicinity of low scrub and isolated bushes. Damp localities, dense vegetation and heavily shaded regions are avoided. These habitat requirements restrict its distribution on Thassos.

COLUBRIDAE

Coluber jugularis caspius (Gmelin, 1789) Whip Snake. Four specimens were seen in the summer, three of which had been killed. The single living example measured 135 cm and was found at Skala Potamias, the others in low-lying localities in the same region. In October a further three dead specimens were encountered and a freshly cast skin about 100cm in length, also near Skala Potamias.

Malpolon monspessulanus insignitus (Hermann 1758) Montpellier Snake. Seven examples found in the summer, but only two alive. Five of these, including three juveniles, were seen between Kinara and Astris. The remaining two were observed in the central mountains at over 700 m.

Natrix n.persa (Linnæus, 1758) Grass Snake. An interesting find since records of this snake on Thassos are few. Two specimens were seen in a mountain stream, at the same locality as *R. graeca* tadpoles, in late June. The neck patches were a deep yellow, and the body barring dark. Total lengths around 50 cm.

PART 2

The checklist is divided into two parts: **A** – confirmed records, **B** – dubious records. It is evident that Thassos has been neglected compared with other islands (groups) and much of the information listed in Ondrias (1968) and Chondropoulos (1986, 1989) is based on old records, in many cases pre-war. Some species are seldom encountered, either due to seasonal preferences, or scarcity. Especially can be mentioned *Typhlops vermicularis* representing the first case and *Tenuidactylus kotschy* the second. In recent years significant contributions have been made by Yeomans and Laister who visited Thassos in May 1989 and 1990, probably the optimum month. Comments are given for species which are of special interest or where there lingers doubt as to identity.

LIST A

BUFONIDAE *Bufo bufo spinosus* Common Toad. *Bufo v. viridis* Green Toad.

HYLIDAE *Hyla a. arborea* Tree Frog;

RANIDAE *Rana. dalmatina* Agile Frog. *Rana graeca* Stream Frog. *Rana r. ridibunda* Marsh Frog

EMYDIDAE *Mauremys caspica rivulata* Stripe-necked Terrapin

TESTUDINIDAE *Testudo graeca ibera* Spur-thighed Tortoise

GEKKONIDAE *Hemidactylus t. turcicus* Turkish Gecko. *Tenuidactylus kotschy bibroni* Naked-fingered Gecko. Both these species seem uncommon.

ANGUIDAE *Anguis fragilis colchicus* Slow Worm – listed by Chondropoulos (1986) quoting Cyren (1993) and Werner (1938) but not found in recent years. *Ophisaurus apodus thracicus* Glass Snake.

LACERTIDAE *Lacerta v. viridis* Green Lizard; *Ophisops elegans macrodactylus* Snake-eyed Lizard.

TYPHLOPIDAE *Typhlops vermicularis* Worm Snake – first recorded in 1989 by Andrew Laister (Clark 1993).

VIPERIDAE *Vipera ammodytes meridionalis* Long-nosed Viper.

LIST B

TESTUDINIDAE *Testudo marginata* Marginated Tortoise. The inclusion of this species rests on the identification of a single specimen, agreeing with the description given in Arnold, Burton & Overton (1978), found by Laister in 1989. In deciding whether Laister's identification is correct one should remember a) old examples of *T. graeca* resemble *T. marginata* b) Thassos lies outside the known range of *T. marginata*. The most northerly and easterly locality is from Mt. Vermion near Veroia in central Macedonia, at least 200 km. west of Thassos (Loumbourdis & Kattoulas 1983). However there are isolated reports of *T. marginata* from scattered localities outside the established range: the Cycladean islands of Paros (Clark, 1970), Milos (Cattaneo, 1984), Syros and Naxos as well as Chios (Dimitropoulos, 1987). The fact that these tortoises are fairly common on Chios led Dimitropoulos to the conclusion that they could have been deliberately introduced in historical times and managed to establish themselves. The occasional specimen that turns up on the Cyclades is more likely to have escaped from captivity or been released by its owner. If one accepts Laister's diagnosis then the occurrence of this species on Thassos is due to introduction.

SCINCIIDAE *Chalcides o. ocellatus* Eyed Skink. This species is not included in the herpetofauna of Thassos by Chondropoulos (1986). The species was supposedly sight-identified by Yeomans (Laister, pers.comm.) and also by a companion to Kevin Hingley in 1995. Hingley (pers.comm.) doubts this latter identification, suspecting confusion with

Lacerta viridis which is quite variable in coloration, sometimes even orange in ground colour. On the unsatisfactory nature of these observations I feel that more evidence is needed to establish the occurrence of this lizard on Thassos.

LACERTIDAE *Podarcis t.aurica* Balkan Wall Lizard. According to Yeomans (1993), Laister (pers.comm.) and Hingley (pers.comm.) this species is common on Thassos. Again I suspect misidentification and confusion with young and half-grown *L.viridis*. Despite several visits to Thassos I have never seen it although it occurs on the mainland (Buttle, 1989; Clark unpublished). A subspecies, *L.t. thassopoulae*, occurs on Thassopoula island between Thassos and the mainland port of Keramoti.

COLUBRIDAE *Coronella austriaca* Smooth Snake. Gruber (1979) states that this species "could with certainty be expected also on Thassos" based on the occurrence of this snake on neighbouring Samothraki. Since Samothraki has some species which do not occur on Thassos viz. *Lacerta trilineata*, *Podarcis muralis*, *Podarcis erhardii*, and *Elaphe longissima* it seems unwise to make assumptions.

Elaphe quatuorlineata sauromates Four-lined Snake. Listed by Chondropoulos (1989) who quotes Gruber (1979). If this species occurs it is rare. This is so on the mainland Kordges & Hemmer, (1987), a fact that I can confirm. Despite many investigations in northern Greece I have only found one specimen and that was just over the border in Turkish Thrace (Clark, 1973). In the summer of 1997 I found one example of the nominate form in the foothills of Vrontou mountain, village of Orini. Gruber's paper contains certain distributional errors, e.g. that *E.quatuorlineata* exists on the eastern Aegean islands. Here *Coluber nummifer* (*C.ravergieri*) has a wide distribution and has sometimes been mistakenly identified as *E.quatuorlineata*, e.g. on Kos (Lotze, 1977).

SUMMARY

The herpetofauna of Thassos consists of 5 amphibians (2 toads, 3 frogs) and 14 reptiles (1 tortoise, 1 terrapin, 6 lizards, 6 snakes), a total of 19 species. The possibility that some of the species mentioned in List B may also occur brings the total to a potential 24. In addition a further two species need to be considered: *Ablepharus kitaibelli*, Snake-eyed Skink, and *Emys orbicularis*, European Pond Tortoise. As I have indicated (Clark, 1993) the apparent absence of the former species is curious considering its otherwise ubiquitous range. This little skink prefers cool, dampish situations and is most commonly found in the early spring and autumn. *E.orbicularis* has recently been recorded from Samothraki (Broggi, 1988) where it is sympatric with *Mauremys caspica*.

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