A DISTRIBUTION RECORD OF THE BANDED NEWT, *TRITURUS VITTATUS*, FROM THE MESOPOTAMIAN PLAIN, SOUTHEASTERN TURKEY

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THE distribution of the two southern subspecies of the Banded Newt, *Triturus vittatus vittatus* and *T. v. cilicensis*, in Turkey has recently been summarzied by Franzen & Schmidtler (2000). The authors showed that the species' currently known easternmost localities in southeastern Turkey are near Gölbası (Adıyaman province, 37°41'N 37°32'E: *T. v. cilicensis*) and west of Kilis (Kilis province, 36°49'N 36°53'E: *T. v.* cf. *cilicensis*). However, Kennedy (1937) published a far more eastern locality in extreme northern Iraq, close to the Turkish border (spring Kuni Sheikh Omar near Berisa village in Kurdistan, 36°56'N 44°17'E). This record is somewhat uncertain since it is unclear, if Kennedy himself had specimens at hand, as he thanks a Dr. Macfadyen for his observation. Subsequently, the locality has not been confirmed by other workers, neither in northern Iraq nor in directly adjoining southeastern Turkey. Perhaps for reasons of reliability, the Iraq record has not been mentioned by some recent authors (Engelmann, Fritzsche, Günther & Obst, 1993; Griffiths, 1996; Arntzen & Olgun, 2000), while others refer to the species distribution in northern Iraq (Schmidtler & Schmidtler, 1967; Olgun, Tok, Arntzen & Türkozan, 1997; Borkin, 1999).

I surprisingly collected four specimens of *Triturus vittatus* on 21 April 2000, from the recently dried out riverbed of the Habur cayı, approximately 5 km northwest of Ceyıanplnar, Sanlıurfa province, southeastern Turkey (36°52'N 40°00'E) (Fig. 1). Two juveniles (ZSM 921/2000 [22 mm snout-vent length], 922/2000 [24 mm SVL]) and remains of two adults (ZSM 919/2000 [mummified] and 920/2000 [skull and vertebral column]) were collected from under stones along small patches where humidity remained. The locality lies within an extensive area of heavily overgrazed steppe, mainly on limestone with numerous scattered, small stones. With the exception of small bushes along the riverbed any higher vegetation was lacking (Fig. 2). The Ceyıanplnar area is one of the driest regions in Turkey, receiving only 300-400 mm annual precipitation (Hütteroth, 1982). Other amphibians and reptiles collected or observed near the locality are *Pelobates syriacus* (tadpoles) and lake frogs (*Rana bedriagae* or *R. ridibunda*) in nearby rock pools, and *Mabuya aurata* and *Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus* on a dry, rocky slope. In addition, the locality and its immediate surrondings are known to feature some thermophilous, desert-dwelling reptile species (*Varanus griseus*: Eiselt, 1970; *Coluber ventromaculatus*: Baran, 1982).

The Ceyıanplnar record extends the southern range of *T. vittatus* in Turkey some 280 km to the east (as measured from the Kilis record) and nearly halves the distance between the Mediterranean distribution area and the Iraqi record. Previously it appeared that the ranges of *T. v. vittatus* and *T. v. cilicensis* were restricted to the zone of Mediterranean and Submediterranean winter rains with Mediterranean hard-leaf forest (mean annual precipitation 600-2000 mm: Hütteroth, 1982). The Ceyıanplnar population is the first discovered within the climatic zone of the semihumid steppe forest with Mesopotamian Artemisia steppe (Mayer & Aksoy, 1986) and suggests a more extensive distribution in the upper Mesopotamian plain and along the southern slopes of the eastern Taurus mountains.

The two juvenile specimens have distinctly interrupted lower dark lateral bands (6/5 [left/right] and 5/2 interruptions between limbs), a

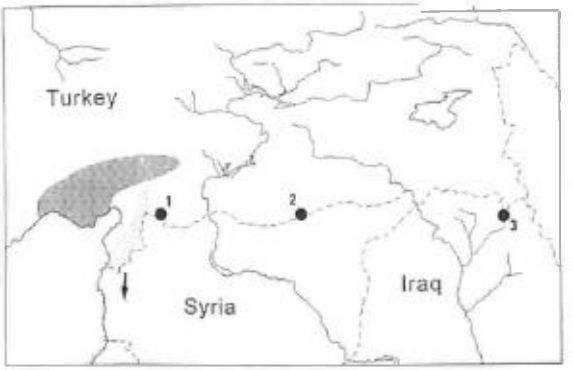

Fig. 1. Distribution of *Triturus vittatus* subspecies in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq. Dark hatching: *T. v. cilicensis;* light hatching: *T. v. vittatus* (see Franzen & Schmidtler, 2000 for a comprehensive list of localities). 1 - W Kilis *(T. v.* cf. *cilicensis*; Franzen & Schmidtler, 2000). **2** - Ceyıanplnar (*T. v.* cf. *cilicensis*, this work). **3** - Berisa, Iraq (*T. v.* ssp.; Kennedy, 1937).

Fig. 2. Habitat of *Triturus vittatus* cf. *cilicensis* northwest of Ceyıanplnar (Yanlıurfa province, Turkey).

condition which is rather typical for *T. v. cilicensis* (Schmidtler & Schmidtler, 1967; Atatür, 1974; Olgun et al., 1997; Franzen & Schmidtler, 2000). 26 specimens of *T. v. cilicensis* from the Adana-Mersin area and Gölbasl examined by Franzen & Schmidtler (2000) showed a mean of 4.5 interruptions (mean of left and right body side; SD: 1.62; min. 2.5, max. 9), while 18 specimens of *T. v. vittatus* from the Syrian Rift Valley had only a mean of 1.0 interruptions (SD: 1.1; min. 0, max. 4.5). However, since other characters important for a subspecific attribution (e.g. upper dark lateral band, tail bands: Olgun et al., 1997; Franzen & Schmidtler, 2000) could not be examined in newly collected specimens due to the non-breeding condition, I only provisionally attribute them to *T. v. cilicensis.* Franzen & Schmidtler (2000) reported on a single specimen of *T. vittatus* from west of Kilis (now ZSM 68/1999) which they compared to *Triturus vittatus cilicensis*, too. The subspecific attribution of this subadult specimen was based on the broadly interrupted lower lateral bands with 3/5 interruptions. However, since the Kilis locality lies very close to the *T. v. vittatus* populations of the Syrian Rift Valley and identification of single specimens is problematic, the authors referred the specimen to *T. v.* cf. *cilicensis*, too. Due to the unknown morphological variation of the Mesopotamian plain populations, even a distinct subspecific status should be considered.

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