

Snake-eyed Lizard

***Ophisops elegans* (Menetries, 1832) ssp. *macrodactylus* Berthold, 1932**

Ophisops elegans Menetr.: Kovatscheff, 1917: 176; *Ophisops elegans ehrenbergi* Wiegmann [sic!]: Muller, 1933: 6; Beskov & Beron, 1964: 18; *Ophisops elegans ehrenbergii* Wiegmann; Buresch & Zonkow, 1933: 193; Beshkov & Nanev, 2002: 33.

Order Squamata

Family Lacertidae

Conservation status: in *Bulgaria*: **Vulnerable VU** [B2a], BDA-III; *International*: BeC-II, HD-IV.

General distribution. The Balkan peninsula: Greece (the prov. Evros, Xanthi, Drama, all eastern Aegean islands, Thassos and Karpathos), Bulgaria (the eastern parts of the Eastern Rhodopes), European Turkey, Asia Minor (without the Black Sea coast and the neighbouring regions), Cyprus, the countries beyond the Caucasus Mountains (Eastern Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), Russia (Checheno-Ingushetia, Dagestan), the Eastern Mediterranean, in the east to Pakistan; Northern Africa in the west to Algeria.

Distribution and abundance in Bulgaria. The far border regions in the Eastern Rhodopes in two habitats isolated one from the other: around the village of Mezek [1, 2, 3] and the valley of the river Byala reka to the east of the village of Meden buk [2, 4]. In the region of the village of Mandritsa in 1979 up to 10-15 individuals could be observed within an hour [5], and in 2001 4-6 individuals in a 50 meter transect [4]. In the region above the village of Mezek in 2004 the species had average numbers in transects 100 / 5 m – up to 8,2 individuals [3]. The habitat immediately near the village of Mezek is probably destroyed because of forestation with black pine of the slopes near the village [4]; the species is found over this belt to the ridge parts of the Gorata hill [3].

Habitats. In the region of the river Byala reka it is found at altitudes of up to about 200-250 m, whereas over the village of Mezek at altitudes from 300 to 650 m [3]. It is found in dry terrains overgrown with xerothermic grasses and shrubs and sticks to stony and rocky terrains, screes, steep slopes over roads, ravines, quarries, etc. [6].

Biology. The species is markedly warmth-loving. It remains active even in the hottest hours of the day in the summer season, when the other lizards are resting. It moves extremely fast. Copulation is in May. It lays 2-6 eggs until the middle of July. It feeds on small invertebrates.

Similar species. It differs from the other species of the Lacertidae family with the lack of an eyelid and the larger, slightly pointed and not grainy scales on the back.

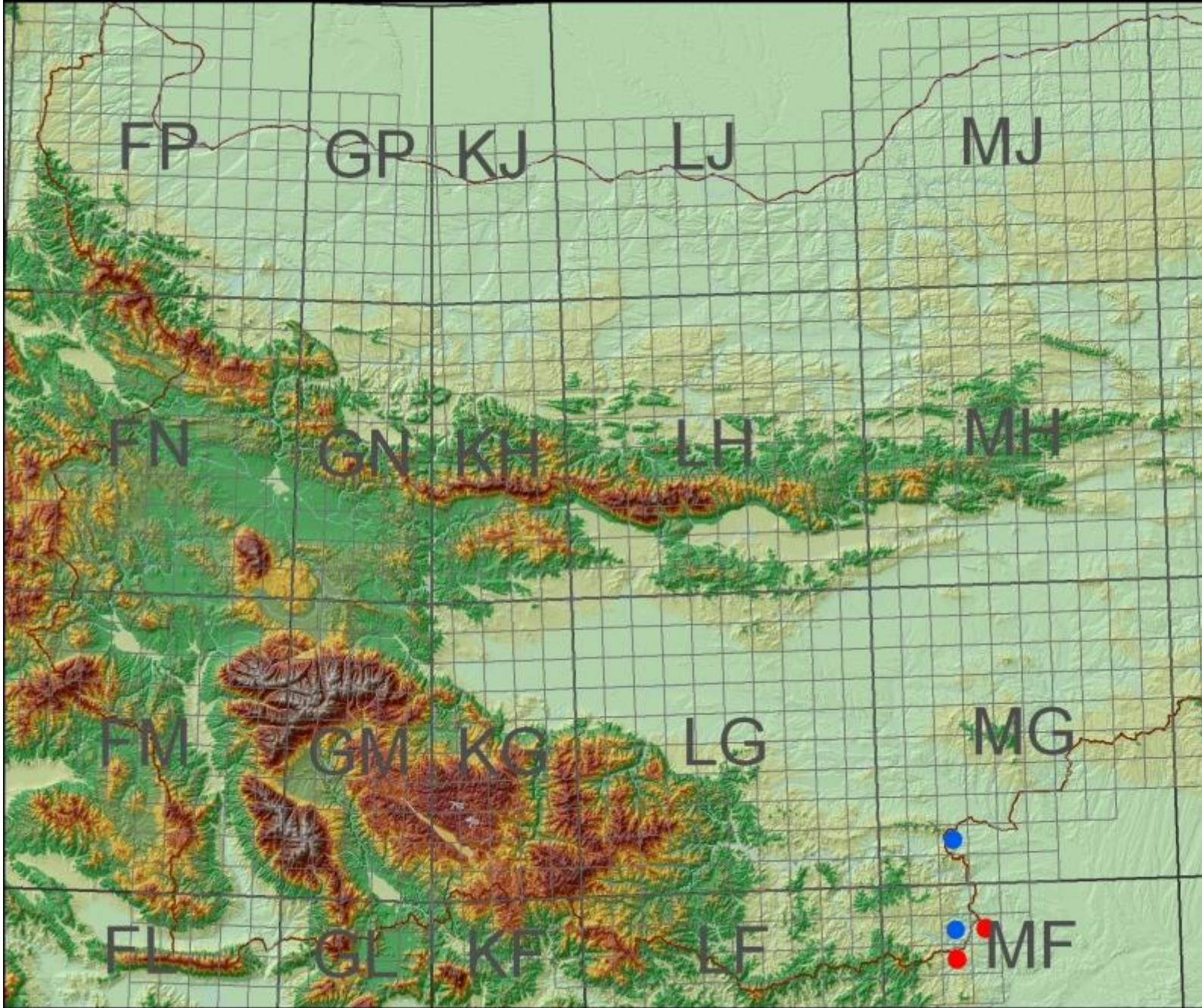
Negative factors. A proved negative factor is reforestation with coniferous wood species (black pine), which is the reason for the disappearance from the habitat of the species immediately near the village of Mezek. Understudied is the effect of fires. Preliminary data show that it successfully occupies burnt down regions (in the areas of the villages Meden buk, Dolno Lukovo and Mandritsa).

Conservation measures taken. Included in the Bulgarian Red Data Book, 1985, in the category *rare*. Its habitats are in the *Natura 2000* network of protected territories. It has been portrayed on a poster for the protection of reptiles (1998).

Conservation measures needed. Preservation of the habitats of the species. Disallowing reforestation with coniferous plantations in the territories in which it is found.

References. 1. Muller 1933; 2. Burech & Zonkow, 1933; 3. Tzankov, 2004; 4. Petrov, Stoev, Beshkov, 2001; 5. Beshkov, 1985; 6. Beshkov & Nanev, 2002.

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- Site before 1985
- Site before 2003
- Site after 2003

Snake-eyed Lizard (distribution map)



^Photograph: Krastyo Nanev



^Photograph: Valko Biserkov



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^Photograph: Valko Biserkov



^Photograph: Georgi Popgeorgiev



^Photograph: Ivan Yanchev