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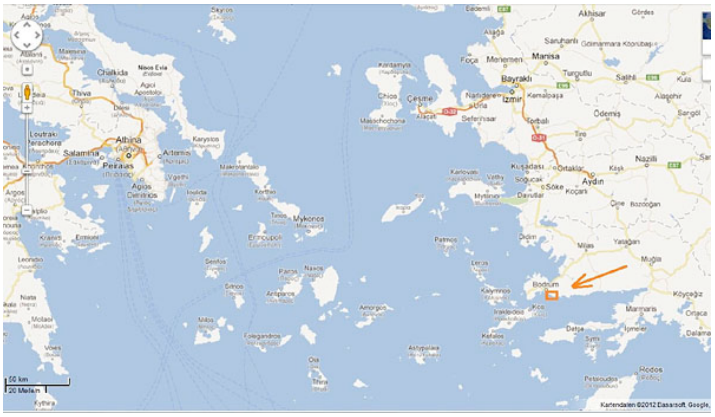
Herpetological and other encounters near Bodrum, SW Turkey

GUNTRAM DEICHSEL, January 2013

Introduction

FRANZEN et al. (2008) name 65 species of amphibians and reptiles for south-western Turkey. Bearing this in my mind, I had high herpetological expectations during two beach holidays in hotel resorts in the village of Yaliçiftlik, approximately 8 km SE of the city of Bodrum in the province of Muğla from June 4 - 11 and October 1 - 8 in the year 2012. I did not survey the area in a systematic manner but did rather document random trailside encounters and their circumstances.



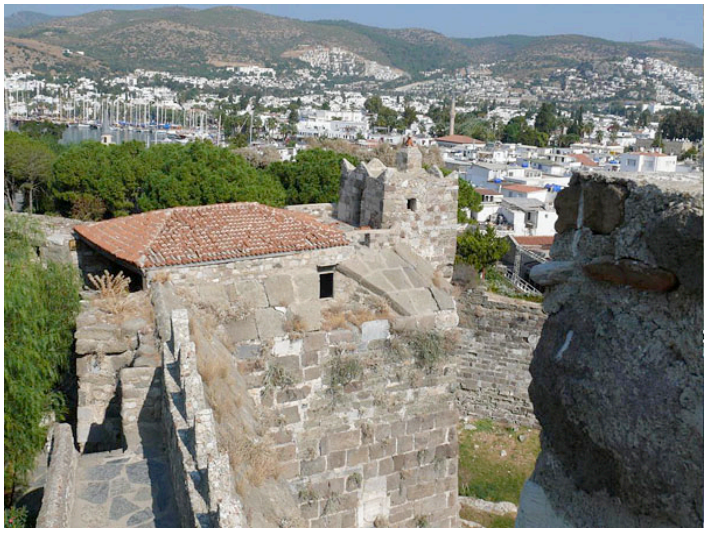
[1] Gross map Athens – Izmir – Bodrum – Rhodes.

[2] Satellite image Bodrum – Yalliçiftlik with indication of localities where herps were encountered.

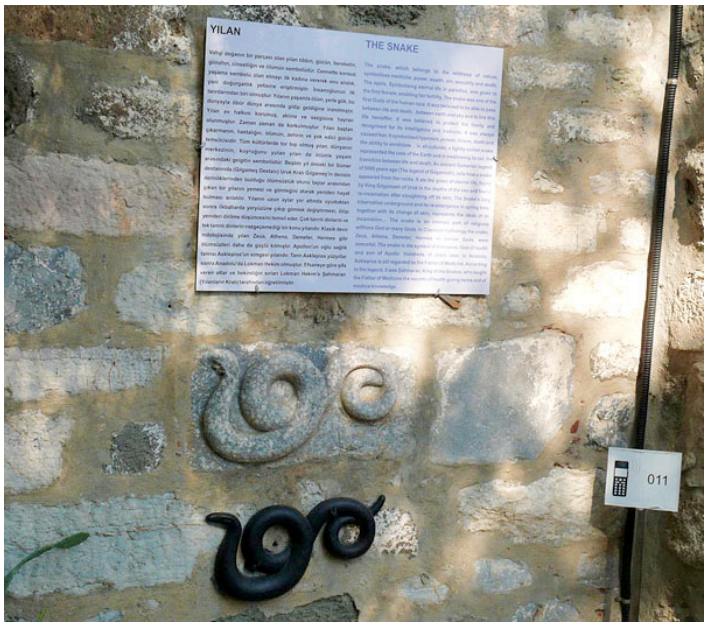
The unexpected low observation density of reptiles and amphibians was a surprise, hence the tourist-infested city of Bodrum (pop. ca. 30,000) turned out to be a "herpetological desert". The castle there was expanded to its present large size by the German knight-architect Heinrich Schlegelholt from the year 1402 on and is a "must visit" for every tourist. It hosts an internationally renowned archaeological museum displaying objects from excavations and a museum devoted to the young discipline of underwater archaeology, presenting sunken ancient ships and their cargo. After the detection of the tomb of the so-called "Carian Princess" in 1990, her face was re-modelled from her skull by means of modern criminology techniques – I mention this just as one example of the many positive surprises a visitor experiences. They compensated my disappointment due to the lack of reptiles on the indeed "lizardable" walls and in the green castle areas with neglected structures making ideal habitats, judging from eyeball view.

As a matter of fact I could not detect any of the "lizards and snakes" which are mentioned on an interpretative poster explaining the fauna of the castle area – with one exception: The "Snake Tower" served up to the Ottoman era as a medical care centre of the castle. As such it is indicated by a snake relief made of stone on an outside wall which was completed by a metal snake sculpture in recent times. The interior of the tower displays a "symposium" of amphorae, arranged in the style of an amphitheatre around a snake chair in the middle.

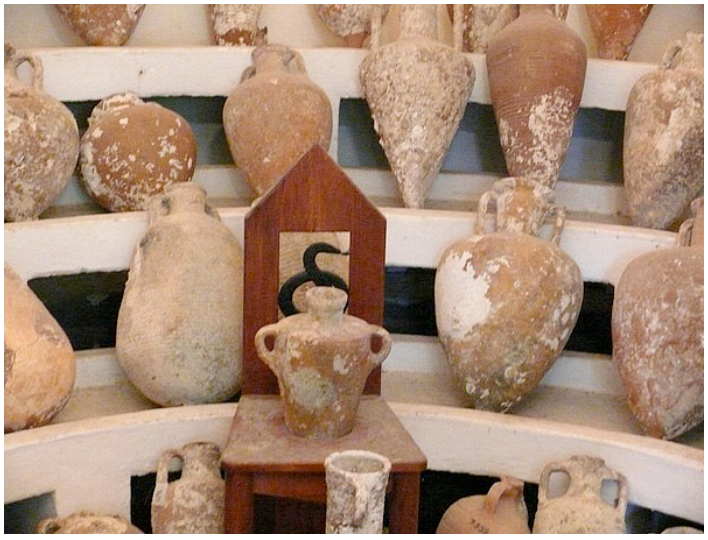
The archeological sites "Lindos Gate" and "Mausoleum of Halicarnassos" (one of the ancient seven wonders of the world) turned out to be reptile negative during a visit around noon in June. In the fountain area of the Mausoleum no frogs were observed despite there being abundant water- and swamp-vegetation.



[3] View towards the City of Bodrum from the castle.



[4] Snake relief and sculpture at the outer wall identify the former medical care centre of the castle.



[5] The interior oft he snake tower is designed as a symposium of amphorae around a snake chair.

[6] Adult Turkish Gecko, *Hemidactylus turcicus*.

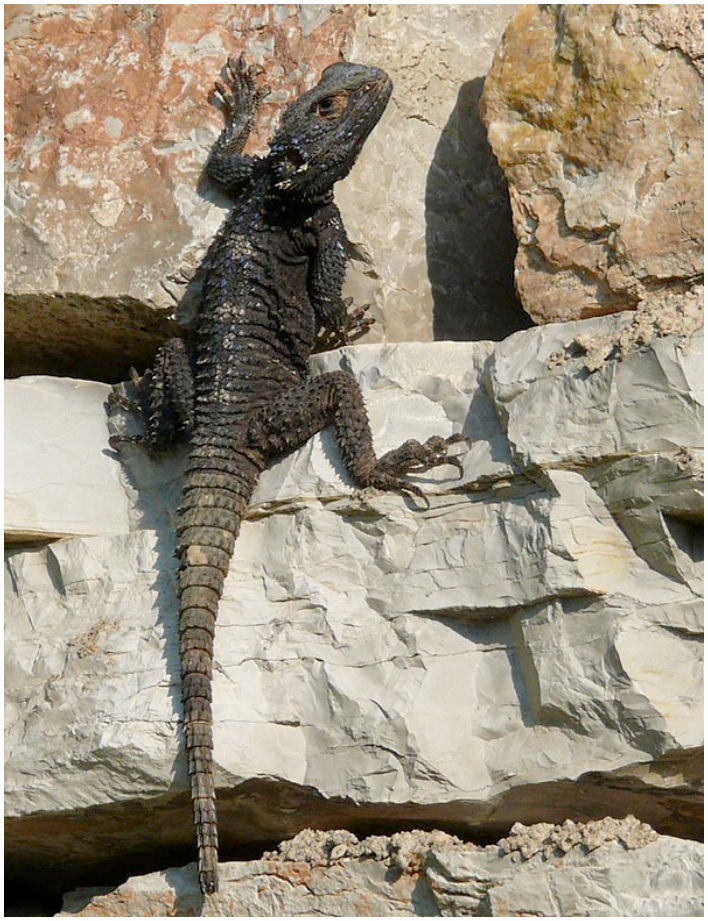
[7] Turkish Gecko, *Hemidactylus turcicus*, hatchling.

Reptile encounters in Yaliçiftlik

Although the visited hotel resorts are managed according to an ecological codex, they were almost free of lizards with the exception of few *Hemidactylus turcicus* observed on buildings and at lanterns in niches on walls accompanying trails at night, and likewise few *Stellagama stellio daani* occupying stairs and walls in the gardens during daytime. One *Ophisops elegans macrodactylus* was encountered in June and another one in October, respectively. I found a fresh road kill of *Lacerta trilineata diplochondrodes* near the water carrying mouth section of a stream in June.

According to hotel personnel, snakes ("Black Mountain Snake") visit the hotel gardens occasionally. Near a hotel resort I observed a fleeing *Dolichophis j. jugularis* in June and I found a snake's dress with 19 scales around the middle of the body, matching this species, in October.

[8] Female Starred Agama, *Stellagama stellio daani*.



[9] Male Starred Agama, *Stellagama stellio daani*.

[10] Starred Agama, female hatchling.

[11] Starred Agama, group of hatchlings.

[12] Female *Ophisops elegans macrodactylus*.

[13] Hatchling of the Snake-eyed lacertid.

[14-17] Juvenile Ottoman viper *Montivipera xanthina* (taken shortly after sunrise in light with a high proportion of red which was deliberately not corrected digitally)

[15] Defensive posture.

[16] Ventral aspect.

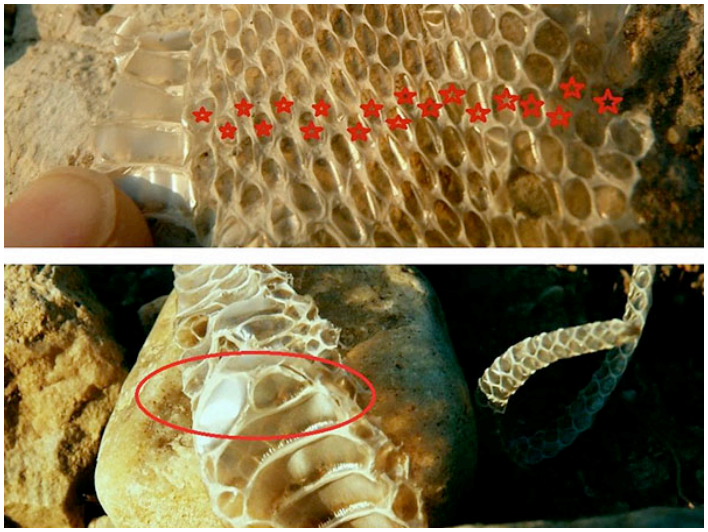
The highlight was a juvenile (30 cm) *Montivipera xanthina*. I encountered him on a road at night, slowly "concertina"-creeping across the smooth tarmac where I picked him up to avoid the risk of injury from passing vehicles and released him in a chaparral area, reachable only by foot, in the next morning.

I found *Mauremys rivulata* in good numbers in the water-carrying mouth section of a stream, the upstream part of which became dry. Approach up to a remarkable distance of only 3 m was possible in the cover of reeds. Flight distance during uncovered approach was more than 20 m.

[17] Portrait.

[18] At this site of release of the Ottoman viper, there was a sighting of a fleeing Anatolian Large Whip Snake and the encounter of the Predatory Bush Cricket (Fig. 33). The habitat is covered with chaparral succession vegetation after a wildfire which destroyed the former pine wood there and which reportedly took place two years ago.

[19-20] Dress of an Anatolian Large Whip Snake, *Dolichophis j. jugularis*.



[20] Scalation: 19 rows of unkeeled scales around the middle of the body, anal plate divided.

[21] Balkan Terrapins, *Mauremys rivulata*, of all age classes.

[22] *Mauremys rivulata*, adult.

[23] Beginning of the water carrying mouth section of a stream which fell dry upstream with *Mauremys* and *Bufo variabilis* as well as *Lacerta trilineata* nearby.

[24-25] Roadkill of a male Balkan Green Lizard.

[25] *Lacerta trilineata diplochondrodes*.

[26] *Pelophylax* cf. *bedriagae*, adult female.

[27] *Pelophylax* cf. *bedriagae*, juvenile.

Amphibian encounters in Yaliçiftlik

I found a flattened roadkill of a female *Bufo variabilis* on a road along the "*Mauremys* stream". The vegetation-free mouth section of another stream in the middle of the village , where it discharges under the pebble beach into the sea, was inhabited by *Pelophylax ridibundus* sensu latu in good numbers. The scientific names are taken from FRANZEN et al. (2008).

However, the specific states of south-western Turkish water frogs are still under discussion and yet to be determined which WERNER MAYER, AXEL KWET and BURKHARD THIESMEIER kindly confirmed.

I am indebted to MICHAEL FRANZEN who describes the present state of discussion in an email to me of 20 November 2012: "PLÖTNER et al (2012) offer the most recent state of the region's Water Frogs. They refer to animals from western and central Anatolia as *P.* cf. *bedriagae* 2 and those from the south-east as cf. *bedriagae* 1 in the cladogram on p. 271. Hence you are on the safe side with the indication *Pelophylax* cf. *bedriagae*." (Translation: GD)

[28] *Pelophylax* cf. *bedriagae*, juvenile.

[29] *Pelophylax* cf. *bedriagae*, juvenile.

[30] *Pelophylax* cf. *bedriagae*, juvenile.

[31] *Pelophylax site* – stream mouth on the pebble beach in the centre of the village of Yaliçiftlik.

[32] Roadkill of female Green Toad, *Bufo variabilis*.

Remarkable other encounters

After I released the *Montivipera* in the chaparral area mentioned above I came across a male Predatory Bush Cricket *Saga rhodiensis*, measuring 8 cm.

In a pine grove there were *Gryllus bimaculatus* chirping after dusk in October. They seem to have replaced the cicadas I missed, due to the late season. At the border of a pasture within the village of Yaliçiftlik I found a Late Autumn Crocus *Colchicum variegatum*. The lower altitude boundary of the range of this flower is 150 m above sea level, according to the Wikipedia entry which presumably refers to DAVIS (1984) without indicating this source, according to PETER SCHÖNFELDER in an e-mail to me. Hence, concerning the altitude, this finding on the coast is remarkable.

Credits

I thank AXEL HOCHKIRCH (University of Trier) for determination of the insects and WERNER MAYER (Museum of Natural History in Vienna), AXEL KWET (Fellbach), BURKHARD THIESMEIER (Bielefeld) and MICHAEL FRANZEN (Zoologische Staatssammlung München) for discussion of the specific states of the amphibians. HANS LAUX and KARL KECK, (Biberach an der Riss) determined the Late Autumn Crocus.

PETER SCHÖNFELDER (University of Regensburg) commented the altitude distribution of this flower in the Wikipedia entry and pinpointed the book by DAVIS (1984) as the assumed but not cited source to me.

[33] Rhodes Predatory Bush Cricket, *Saga rhodiensis*. (size 8 cm).

[34] *Gryllus bimaculatus*, female.

Literature

DAVIS, P. H. (1984): Flora of Turkey, vol. 8: 344

FRANZEN, M. & BUßMANN, M. & KORDGES, T. & THIESMEIER, B. (2008): Die Amphibien und Reptilien der Südwest-Türkei. - Laurenti-Verlag, Bielefeld, 328 pp.

PLÖTNER, J. & BAIER, F. &, AKIN, C. et al. (2012): .Genetic data reveal that water frogs of Cyprus (genus *Pelophylax*) are an endemic species of Messinian origin. - Zoosystematics and Evolution, 88 (2): 261-283.

WIKIPEDIA - Späte Schachbrett-Herbstzeitlose - Downloaded 2012-Dec-23.

[35]
Colchicum variegatum
Late Autumn crocus