

Reptiles and Amphibians seen in Sardinia

by A. J. Mobbs

Sardinia, the second largest island in the Mediterranean, has few endemic amphibians and my wife and I did not see a single specimen during a two-week stay on the island in June, 1978. Early one morning we did hear tree frogs (*Hyla arborea sarda*) calling but were unable to actually locate any.

A tour representative mentioned that large numbers of newly metamorphosed frogs (or toads) were leaving a pool situated in the garden of a hotel in the centre of Alghero, but although I was promised some of these, nothing came of it and I was unable to ascertain which species the frogs (or toads) were.

The port of Alghero where we stayed, is included in the range of the European Leaf-toed Gecko (*Phyllodactylus europaeus*); but as the species is nocturnal and prefers to hide away under stones or the bark of dead trees rather than dwellings, I was not surprised when we were unable to locate any during our travels.

The Moorish Gecko (*Tarentola mauritanica*) was very much in evidence in and around Alghero. One particularly large specimen could be seen at almost any hour of the day either resting between its favourite rocks (which were at times washed by waves), or during quiet periods, basking in the open. In their book "Reptiles and Amphibians of Britain and Europe", Arnold and Burton mention that this species can measure as much as 15 cm overall length. This does appear somewhat large for a Moorish Gecko, but after seeing the exceptionally large specimen referred to above, I can

quite believe that certain specimens do attain such a size.

The beauty of Sardinia is often marred by the unbelievable amount of refuse one sees lying around. On the beach one finds broken bottles, tin cans and any amount of wrapping paper. What could be beautiful picnic areas are often spoiled by people (usually Italians) leaving their litter behind. I mention this because although it adds little to the beauty of the island, such litter does attract certain species of reptiles and can therefore prove most advantageous when one is hunting for such creatures. An old mattress which had been thrown on to a ledge some 50 yds from the shore along one of the stretches of beach near the centre of Alghero, proved a most excellent hunting place. The mattress could be seen from the pavement which divided the beach from the road and from a vantage point, we often saw Wall Lizards (*Podarcis sicula cettii*) (or Ruin Lizards as they are sometimes known), basking on the mattress. A day or so before leaving for home, I began to collect a few reptiles to bring back with me and upon investigating the mattress, I found underneath, two Ocellated Skinks (*Chalcides ocellatus tiligugu*), one medium sized Moorish Gecko, a pair of Wall Lizards and numerous large (5 cm) long-legged beetles (species unknown).

Ocellated Skinks were fairly numerous in and around the Alghero area and most of those we came across were found under pieces of plastic sheeting which had been



Tyrrhenian wall lizard (female)

left lying around on scrubland some 300 yds from the shoreline. Condensation was always present under this sheeting and as certain areas under the mattress were also permanently damp, it is possible this skink prefers slightly moist conditions.

Without doubt the most abundant species of lizard in the Alghero area is *P. sicula cettii*. Males of this species could be seen basking (or if one went too close, could be heard scuttling away to cover) all along the rocky areas of the seashore. This species is a vigorous and most opportune lizard and can be found everywhere other than the rockless sandy beaches. A pair lived in the town centre itself, making their home in a large urn planted with a free-growing succulent. I saw this pair many times when they were basking on the small lawned area surrounding the urn and did in fact attempt to capture them, but found them impossible to locate once they had hidden away in the stems of the plant. This lizard could also be found in large numbers on the scrubland situated some 300 yds from the beach, but does not appear to be present (in any great numbers) further inland; although we did capture a solitary male found hiding under the bark of a tree some half mile from the beach near to an inland waterway.

This lizard is also found on Corsica and during a visit to the fortress town of Bonifacio, we saw a male (rather tatty in appearance due to an imminent slough) running along the sea wall.

Sardinia wall lizard (female)



Male *P. sicula cettii* far outnumbered females, but this did not appear to be the case with the Tyrrhenian Wall Lizard (*P. t. tiliguerta*); in fact the three specimens we saw were all females. These were seen in the mountainous areas a few miles from Nuoro near the centre of the island. We had stopped for a barbecue in a large olive grove and after the feast, my wife and I took a stroll alongside a small stream to see what wildlife could be found. *Tiliguerta* appears to be far less timid than *sicula* and although I was not keen to capture any lizards at such an early stage of our holiday, I did touch these females with my hand and have no doubt that capture would have proved relatively easy.

As it turned out, these three females were the only ones of this particular species we were to see in the wild. We did bring back a male, but this lizard was found in a pet store where it was about to be used as snake food! Although the pet store proprietor knew no English and we knew no Italian, he did manage to impart that the lizard "could be found all over the walls of Alghero and was, in fact, *Laerta viridis*" (both observations being totally incorrect!).

It has always been a minor ambition of mine to see a tortoise in the wild, but other than the pet owned by some people whose house was opposite the hotel in which we stayed, I did not see any tortoises at all. Seeing captive tortoises pottering about the gardens always makes me feel that such creatures are surely most vulnerable in the wild; yet they survive and if left alone by man, appear to have few enemies.

My wife and I had very much wanted to see snakes whilst in Sardinia. As it happened we did see one Western Whip Snake (*Coluber v. viridiflavus*), but this was from the coach as we travelled along a mountain road on the way to Nuoro. In the Alghero area, we found ten of these snakes along the roadsides; all had been killed by vehicles. To find ten in a relatively small area proved that there must have been a reasonable number about, but search as we may, we did not find a single live specimen.

In common with many herpetologists, I have a keen interest in certain insects and arachnids—especially the latter. I had promised to bring back an orb-weaving spider for a friend and managed to locate one young female *Argiope bruennichi* the day before we were due to leave for home. We were told that a scorpion had been seen on the hotel beach and a couple of days before we returned home, we made a concentrated search under small rocks along the shore. My wife found the first specimen and a further three were located in a very short space of time. A few hours before we left for the airport, another scorpion was found in almost the same area as we found the others. All these scorpions were found under rocks which were washed by waves at high tide. The scorpion found on Sardinia is rather small being some 2 cm in length. Two of the five we brought back have since given birth.

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