



Skyros & Evia, 26.05. - 04.06.2012

It was end of May and we couldn't resist the call of the Aegean Sea any more. The islands of Skyros and Evia seemed particularly promising because here there are lizard populations whose representatives are characterized by massive body sizes – so we wanted to see these "giants" of Skyros and Evia. Thanks to Lefteris Trakos, Kyriakos Antonopoulos and Werner Mayer.



Our ferry to Skyros: the legendary beautiful Aegean weather...



Southeastern Spain, 10.2016  
11.2017

Skyros

Although our arrival was accompanied by violent thunderstorms in Skyros (we decided not to see this as an omen) the weather calmed down quickly in the coming days – so we were highly motivated to start herping. To our sweet delight it turned out that the island is full of lizards: Podarcis gaigeae, the Skyros Wall Lizard, is apparently not very delicate with regard to its habitat choice.



Jonian Islands, 25.5.-5.6.2017



14.2017



Podarcis gaigeae can be found literally everywhere





Skyros town: in this area we found very colourful lizards



Male *Podarcis gaigeae* with distinctive blue flanks...



Another male with an almost psychedelic pattern



The uni-colour version



An animal with orange throat: the colour of the throat - white, yellow or orange - and the role of "genetic drift" has been subject to research on various island populations of Podarcis gaigeae. In our field observations, we found a potpourri of different colour forms everywhere...



Foam Bath: For Mauremys rivulata, the water quality seems of minor importance

Aegean Islands, 28.05. - 13.06.2011



The first snake: Telescopus fallax



Another rainy morning we started turning stones and found: Telescopus fallax!



This man made wetland contains (besides turtles):



Water frogs (*Pelophylax* sp.)...



...and their predators: *Natrix natrix persica* - the animals seem to tend to melanism on Skyros although this specimen still shows the characteristic persica stripes



Of course the area didn't lack of *Podarcis gaigeae*



In the Aegean Sea, *Mediodactylus kotschy* is represented by numerous sub-species which look all the same for us: according to literature, on Skyros a transitional form of *Mediodactylus kotschy schultzei* x *saronicus* can be found...



In this respect, *Hemidactylus turcicus* is less extravagant: no distinct subspecies on Skyros



Close to the geckos we also found – surprise! – another *Telescopus fallax*

In the following days sunny weather brought the opportunity for our trip to the "giant lizards": Pafilis et al. (2009) had described the phenomenon of gigantism within the populations on the islets of Lakonisi and Exo Diavatis off the coast of Skyros: On Skyros, the SVL of male *Podarcis gaigeae* is about 6 cm, on Lakonissi it is > 7 cm and 8.5 cm on Exo Diavatis.

Overall, the lizards of Exo Diavatis are almost twice as big as on Skyros. Full of expectations we visited these islands. Thanks to [Lefteris Trakos \(Skyros Travel + Tourism\)](#) for organization and *Kyriakos Antonopoulos (Kavos bar / Linaria)* for guiding us.



Lakonisi islet



Landing on Lakonisi – note the numerous seagulls which seem to play a key role in this ecosystem (see Pafilis et al. (2009)): The nesting birds produce guano which promotes plant growth, the plants are food for myriads of insects – plenty of lizard food. As a result, the lizards occur in high population density.



*Podarcis gaigeae gaigeae*: Lakonisi is full of small insects that serve as food for the lizards



A male with regenerated tale: According to Pafilis et al. the high population density and intraspecific aggression lead to cannibalism – a possible reason for gigantism.



Actually, the majority of the animals we observed had regenerated tales – although there are no predators on the island



Lizard, attracted by banana



High-speed transfer to the next island...



Exo Diavatis: obviously, the guano-based community (bird droppings – lush vegetation – lots of insects – high density of lizards) also works on this islet. On Exo Diavatis, even some plant species tend to gigantism and the locals praise the delicious culinary herbs on the islet.



A female "giant" lizard (*Podarcis gaigeae gaigeae*)



A male giant - built more robust than its relatives on Skyros



They are big but not very fast: this one was relatively easy to catch



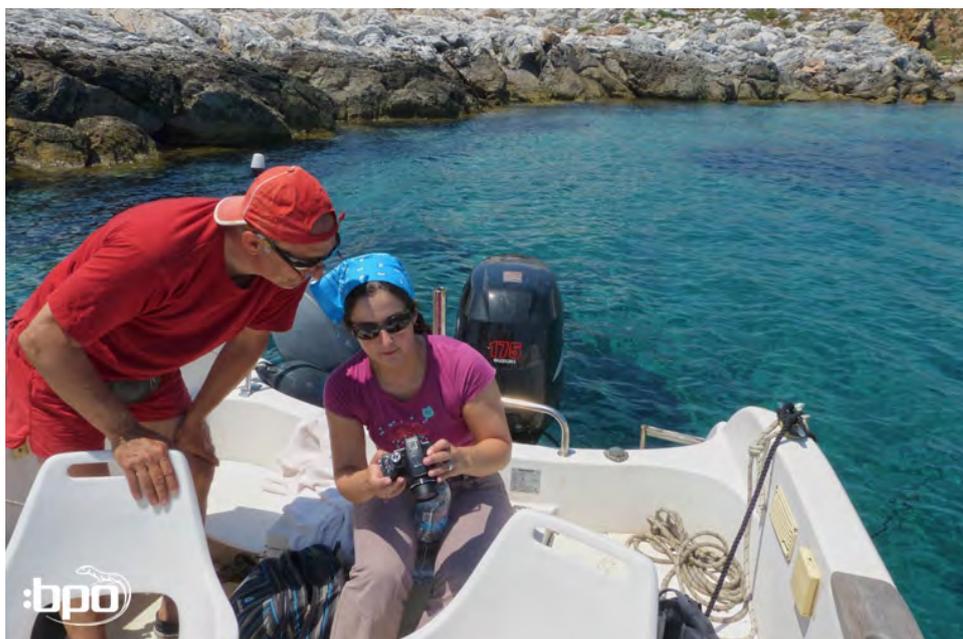
Some animals showed signs of battle: here a forefoot is missing



Those who fail in the struggle for life will be mummified cadavers - predators are missing from Exo Diavatis



Mediodactylus kotschy is also present on Exo Diavatis



Birgit and Kyriakos discussing the photo results

Back on Skyros, we had a day on the beach - but also there, we were surrounded by reptiles...



Even the dunes are populated by *Podarcis gaigeae*



A couple of *Podarcis gaigeae*



Lizard on the beach...



This wetland is home of:



*Natrix natrix* – as far as we know, there are at least three wetlands with grass snakes on the island



Also *Lacerta trilineata* occurs on Skyros, but less abundant than in other parts of Greece



Our daily *Telescopus fallax* ... We missed the other two snake species on Skyros (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*, *Zamenis situla*) as well as *Testudo marginata*.

After four days we had to leave Skyros with a heavy heart and took the ferry to Kymi / Evia.



Looking back to the Bay of Linaria / Skyros

Evia

Northeastern Evia has magnificent landscapes – cliffs, gorges, lush vegetation and the whole scenery is dominated by the Dirfis mountain range (1.700 m). For this mountains, subspecies *Lacerta viridis guentherpetersi* (Rykena et al. (2002)) has been described, which is built stronger than the nominate form: another "giant". Since we didn't find these lizards on Mount Ossa in 2009, we wanted to try our luck at the "terra typica" this time. Again, we needed two attempts to get good pictures: at our first visit on Dirfis we were too late – in the heat of the afternoon the lizards weren't interested in being photographed. Our second try in the early morning hours was more successful.



The north coast of Evia with the Dirfis range



Mats of *Hypericum* sp. in the terra typica of *Lacerta viridis guentherpetersi* at 1000 m altitude



*Lacerta viridis guentherpetersi* or *Lacerta trilineata*?



Podarcis muralis: The animals inhabit the same habitat as the Podarcis erhardii on Dirfis - but different microhabitats. Podarcis muralis were in rather shady, moist places, while Podarcis erhardii apparently prefers the drier places.



Pregnant Podarcis muralis



On Evia, Podarcis erhardii is represented by subspecies livadiacus, a very nice sub-species of the Aegean wall lizard.



Another *Podarcis erhardii livadiacus* - This subspecies seems to prefer mountain habitats: we know about occurrences in the Feneos Basin and Parion, all located at approx. 1000 m altitude. However, we didn't see *Podarcis* in the lower altitudes on Evia.



*Lacerta viridis guentherpetersi*, second attempt: A female warming up in the morning sun



The subspecies *guentherpetersi* has no blue throat in contrast to the nominate form - it looks like *Lacerta trilineata*



As the temperatures were rising the animals hung around in the shade...



Mountain scenery with *Iphiclydes podalirius*



*Argynnis paphia*



At lower altitudes *Lacerta viridis* is replaced by *Lacerta trilineata*



*Anax imperator*



*Marumba quercus*



We would have preferred it alive: *Malpolon insignitus*. Other traffic victims we saw were *Zamenis situla* and numerous *Pseudopus apodus*. Other species seen were *Ablepharus kitaibelii* and *Lissolepis vulgaris*. Obviously, Evia has an interesting herpetofauna which would be worthwhile another trip...



At our final lazy day we shared a nice beach with *Chalcides ocellatus*...

#### Literature

Pafilis, P. & Meiri, S. & Fouvopoulos, J. & Valakos, E. (2009) - Intraspecific competition and high food availability are associated with insular gigantism in a lizard. - *Naturwissenschaften*, 96 (9): 1107-1113.

Runemark, A & Hansson, B & Pafilis, P & Valakos, E & Svensson, E (2010) - Island biology and morphological divergence of the Skyros wall lizard *Podarcis gaigeae*: a combined role for local selection and genetic drift on color morph frequency divergence? - *BMC Evolutionary Biology* 2010, 10: 269

Rykena, S. & Nettmann, H.-K. & Mayer, W. (2002) - *Lacerta viridis guentherpetersi* ssp. nov., eine neue Unterart der Smaragdeidechse aus Griechenland. - *Mertensiella*, Rheinbach, 13: 89-97.