

New evidence for the occurrence of the Dice Snake, *Natrix tessellata* (Laurenti, 1768) on Cyprus

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Abstract. Two subadult specimens of the Dice Snake (*Natrix tessellata*), collected in 1960 at Gönyeli-Nicosia, northern Cyprus, were recovered from the Zoological Collection of the Aegean University at Bornova-Izmir, Turkey. They challenge the view that the only existing voucher specimen of this species from Cyprus could have wrong locality data or was brought to the island by man.

Kurzfassung. Zwei halbwüchsige Würfelnattern (*Natrix tessellata*), bereits 1960 bei Gönyeli-Nicosia, im nördlichen Zypern, gesammelt, wurden in der Zoologischen Sammlung der Ägäischen Universität, Bornova-Izmir, Türkei, wiedergefunden. Sie legen nahe, dass die Art tatsächlich auf Zypern vorkommt, und dass das einzige vorher bekannte Belegexemplar von dieser Insel nicht zwangsläufig als mit falschem Fundort versehen oder aber als anthropogen verschleppt gedeutet werden darf.

Key words. Water snake, *Natrix natrix cypriaca*, faunistics, zoogeography, Middle East.

Introduction

Water snakes of the genus *Natrix* on Cyprus have always had a very peculiar status. The Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) has been known from this island since UNGER & KOTSCHY (1865), and further records were mentioned by GÜNTHER (1879), BOULENGER (1888), CECCONI (1899), and BUCKNILL & BOULENGER (1913). Since then, no further records of Cypriot *N. natrix* have been published so that this species, which was described as an endemic subspecies *N. n. cypriaca* by HECHT (1930), was later believed to have been extinct on Cyprus since the 1930s (or at least since the 1960s) (SCHMIDTLER 1984, DEMETROPOULOS & LAMBERT 1986, SCHÄTTI & SIGG 1989, OSENEGG 1989), until it was unexpectedly rediscovered again by WIEDL & BÖHME (1992; see also BÖHME & WIEDL 1994, BLOSAT et al. 1996, BLOSAT 1998).

A second species of *Natrix*, viz. *N. tessellata*, which is much more abundant along the opposite mainland coasts, was also recorded from Cyprus by UNGER & KOTSCHY (1865) and was also listed for the Cypriot fauna by CECCONI (1899). This information was repeated without any additional evidence by HECHT (1930: 315, "Griechischer Archipel mit Creta und Cypern") and by STEWARD (1979). SCHÄTTI & SIGG (1989) reported a record from the Larnaca District, which was based on a photograph of a live specimen taken by a Dutch traveller (G. P. OXTOBY) made in 1986. Attempts by the junior author to contact this person were unsuccessful (BÖHME & WIEDL 1994), and it seems possible that this observation was based on a confusion with either *N. natrix* (BÖHME & WIEDL op. cit.) or even a young *Hierophis jugularis* (OSENEGG 1989).