

Record of a black-coloured *Natrix* in northeastern Turkey, with comments on the validity of the Bigheaded Grass Snake, *Natrix megalcephala* Orlov & Tunijev, 1987

by David Jandzík

Abstract. A specimen of „*Natrix megalcephala*” was found near Hopa in northeastern Turkey. The morphological characters are compared with other specimens of *N. megalcephala* and *N. natrix scutata* from Russia and Turkey and are discussed together with the diagnostic data from the original description of the species. The morphologically intermediate character of the investigated specimens confirms the previously published doubts about the validity of the weakly diagnosed taxon *N. megalcephala*.

Kurzfassung. Ein Exemplar von „*Natrix megalcephala*” wurde nahe von Hopa in der nordöstlichen Türkei gefunden. Morphologische Merkmale werden mit anderen Exemplaren von *N. megalcephala* sowie mit solchen von *N. natrix scutata* aus Russland und der Türkei verglichen und mit diagnostischen Daten aus der Originalbeschreibung der Art diskutiert. Der morphologisch intermediäre Charakter der untersuchten Exemplare bestätigt die vorher publizierten Zweifel über Validität des schwach diagnostizierten Taxons *N. megalcephala*.

Key words. Reptilia, Colubridae, *Natrix megalcephala*, *Natrix natrix*, Turkey, distribution, taxonomy.

Introduction

Natrix megalcephala was described by ORLOV & TUNIJEV (1987) and apart from the data in the original description no further information has been published about the distribution of this species. According to ORLOV & TUNIJEV (1987, 1999), the taxon occurs in the Caucasus region of Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The westernmost occurrence along the southern coast of the Black Sea is stated to be the vicinity of the Georgian city Batumi near the Georgian-Turkish border. NILSON et al. (1988) reported on the syntopy of this taxon and of *Natrix natrix scutata* (Pallas, 1771) with *Vipera kaznakovi* Nikol'skij, 1909 in the vicinity of Hopa in northeastern Turkey, but unfortunately without any further details or comments. MULDER (1995) mentioned only *N. natrix* from Hopa and briefly discussed its subspecific status. *Natrix megalcephala* was not included in the survey of the Turkish herpetofauna in BARAN & ATATÜR (1997), but its occurrence in the Hopa coastal region was mentioned in Recommendation n° 26 of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) (Council of Europe 1991), as a species in need of special conservation measures. However, the taxonomic position of *N. megalcephala* is not clear: biochemical evidence casting doubt on its species status was published by HILLE (1997), and some morphological problems were discussed by VELENSKÝ (1997).