



## NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETAS HELLENICA HERPETOLOGICA (SHH)

Number 5

Dear friends, we apologise for this prolonged silence and we hope that from this issue forward we will restore the normal publication of the SHH newsletter.

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August 2006

## SHH activities

### Turtles and Amphibians in pet trade

We are all familiar with little turtles offered in pet shops. However few of us are aware that this trade is largely illegal! The species most usually available is *Trachemys scripta elegans*. It is easy to recognize it by a large red patch behind the animals' eye. One of the reasons its trade was forbidden in the EU was because many people "feel sorry" for the turtles and release them in their "natural environment". Despite their good intentions, this practice is wrong and dangerous. *Trachemys scripta* may survive in Greece (though its natural environment is in North America) but here they compete with local species adding to the many pressures wetlands suffer in Greece. Such a pressure may have irreversible effects on many local turtles populations.

Recently, another species, alien to the Greek fauna was seen to be sold in pet shops: The Nile Soft-shelled Turtle, *Trionyx triunguis* mentioned as critically endangered by IUCN. As its name implies, this species' shell is covered by leather giving it a "soft" appearance.

The story of the amphibians mentioned in the title is rather cruel. Salamanders, we observed been sold, are very delicate animals which need special conditions to survive and even so they live for short periods. When asked, the pet shop owner said "he knew, but people keep them for a month or so and then come and buy new ones".

It is worth noting that the species sold was of unknown (but surely not Greek) origin.

We wonder how the authority in charge (Ministry of Agricultural Development and Foods) allows such practices? How (if at all) are imports and exports of animals controlled?

Let us at least deny complying with this inadmissible practice by demanding and insisting to verify the legal documents for the animal we are interested in buying.

Petros Luberkis  
Natural History Museum of Crete

### IUCN meeting on Mediterranean herpetofauna.

IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) is the world's largest and most important conservation network. The Union brings together 82 States, 111 government agencies, more than 800 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership<sup>1</sup>.

In this frame IUCN undertook an initiative for an international workshop on the Amphibians and Reptiles of the Mediterranean. Approximately 40 specialists from almost every Mediterranean country participated, Greece being represented by a member of the national herpetological society (SHH).

One may wonder about the need for such a meeting. Why IUNC did not simply collect data from national authorities?

There are many answers to this question: Many countries do not have relevant authorities. Specialists on one species may not have a global view on other species or even on the group they work on because of poor relationships with neighbouring countries. In many cases as peculiar as it may seem international relationships on environmental matters are not at the level required.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, visit: [www.IUCN.org](http://www.IUCN.org)

The cooperation and the synthesis of data on more than 400 species for one week was an invaluable and constructive experience for all participants. Many "pending" issues on taxonomy or distribution of species, which were too "small" for a dedicated a research program or other questions awaiting international collaboration were explored. The overall knowledge on many species increased to a larger extent than the mere addition of individual knowledge. Basic problems to be solved in the future were accurately defined.

One of the most important outcomes was that all species were evaluated according to a method already applied by IUCN throughout the world and for many kinds of organisms. The direct result of this evaluation was to "label" each species according to their conservation status (e.g. "Endangered", "Vulnerable", "Least Concern", "Data deficient" etc).

Each of these characterizations has an objective value, which results from a series of criteria defined by IUCN and designed to minimize subjective opinions. K

The important indirect result is that now each Mediterranean country has in hands complete<sup>2</sup> and evaluated inventories of their herpetofauna. These inventories are an indispensable tool for any conservation activity or other human activity requiring data from the natural environment.

The extent of which these inventories will be put to use is a matter of each and every one's of us intervention.

The official results of the meeting have not yet been publicly announced, but SHH, is following the subject and will keep our members informed.

*Petros Luberakis  
Natural History Museum of Crete*

### **Reptile and bird collection permits – latest developments**

Following the reactions by SHH and other environmental NGOs and the complaint we had submitted regarding the illogical permits that the Ministry of Rural Development and Food had issued for the collection of a large number of reptiles and birds, the European Commission studied the case and concluded that in total 3 permits had been issued for herpetofauna species and 3 for bird species.

These permits were cancelled. The ones concerning ornithofauna were never executed. However the ones regarding the collection of reptiles had been partially used and as a result 58 individuals from different species to have been collected as well as the total permitted number of tortoises. Since the permits were cancelled the case, as far as the EC is concerned, was closed.

The Greek authorities were committed to the EC to issue a decision on collection issues that will include conditions and requisitions. As far as we know this has not been done yet.

*Panagiota Maragou  
WWF Greece*

## **Scientific congresses**

### **World Sea Turtle Symposium**



The 26th Annual International Symposium on Sea Turtles was organized in Crete from 3-8 April 2006. This Annual Symposium was organized by the

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International Sea Turtle Society and ARCHELON, The Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece. It was the first time that this Annual event was organized in Europe, in Crete where (after Zakynthos) the most important Mediterranean beaches of *Caretta caretta* are located.

Sea turtles of the whole world had their week of honor, while 2006 has been declared as the year of Pacific sea turtles. In this important Annual Symposium

700 delegates from 76 countries took part in the Annual Symposium. It was not only an important scientific meeting of specialists in sea turtle biology and ecology but also a forum for those concerned about the protection of sea turtles and a race against time to avert their obliteration from the seas and oceans of the planet.

In a special session for the Mediterranean, the contribution of the local communities in sea turtle protection was stressed with bright examples from Tsirali of Turkey, where the local agricultural corporation plays a leading role in the conservation of an ecological model for the area, from Kefallonia with the work of the Society "Katelios" and from Platania of Chania, where the local community assists turtle reproduction with various actions (limitation of lights, etc). On the other side the Symposium asked the Greek government to take the responsibility to restore the regular operation of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos.

Representatives of local port authorities and fishing services, as well as members of the Fishermen Society of Rethymno participated in the Mediterranean meeting and put forward their views so as to prevent the entanglement of turtles in nets and fishing lines, which constitutes a serious problem globally.

More: <http://symposium.archelon.gr/main.php?lang=eng>

## **5o World Congress of Herpetology**

The 5th World Congress of Herpetology took place in Stellenbosch, South Africa. The duration of the Congress was from 19 to 24 June 2005 and it was held in the Conservatorium of the Stellenbosch University. The participants were about 400 people. The programme comprised 6 parallel sessions per day, on global declines amphibian, amphibians and reptiles of Africa, morphology, behaviour, taxonomy, reptile conservation, etc.

Stellenbosch is situated 50 km east of Cape Town and is the second oldest town in South Africa. The town of Stellenbosch was developed from a colony of settlers to whom land had been granted on the banks of the Eerste river. Today the town has many restored buildings from the 18th century and on the surroundings there are the famous wine farms, as Stellenbosch is famous of its awarded wines.

There was an available congress tour at the Nature Reserve "Hottentots Holland Nature Reserve" that lies in the Hottentots Holland mountain, some 90 km south east of Cape Town. The reserve is an area of 42000 ha, is rugged and very mountainous, with altitudes ranging from 500 to 1590 m.

Approximately 110 bird species have been recorded on the reserve. We were lucky to see the Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*, the White Necked Raven *Corvus albicollis*, the Malachite Sunbird *Nectarinia famosa*, and the Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura*. Also we saw some big mammals like baboons, elands and zebras. Finally a carapace of the Marsh Terrapin *Pelomedusa subrufa* was found.

South Africa is the third most biologically diverse country in the world, after Indonesia and Brazil. Occupying only about 2% of the global land area, it contains almost 10% of the world's plants and 7% of the reptiles, birds and mammals.

Most of the species we saw were unknown to us, although common in the area, like the Red-winged Starling *Onychognathus morio*, the Pied Crow *Corvus albus*, the Sacred Ibis

*Threskiornis aethiopicus*, etc. In the town of Stellenbosch we managed to find chameleons of the species the Cape Dwarf Chameleon *Bradypodion pumilum* (photo 1).



**Photo 1:** Cape Dwarf Chameleon (*Bradypodion pumilum*). A chameleon species that is often found even in gardens of the south western Cape. It is less solitary than many other chameleons and 5-6 individuals may be found in a single bush (photo. M. Dimaki).



**Photo 2.** Cape Legless Skink (*Acontias meleagris*). Medium sized legless skink that is often found in dry sandy soils beneath stones or dead trees (photo. M. Dimaki).

In Marais park, that is situated in Stellenbosch, we found tortoises of two species: the Angulate tortoise *Chersina angulata*, and the Leopard Tortoise *Geochelone pardalis*, also the Ocellated Gecko *Pachydactylus geitje* and the Cape Legless Skink *Acontias meleagris* (photo 2). Many birds were flying in the park, like the shrike of the species the Common Fiscal *Lanius collaris*, the Fiscal Flycatcher *Sigelus silens*, the common Cape White-Eye *Zosterops capensis*, the Karoo Prinia *Prinia maculosa*, and the Sweet Waxbill *Estrilda melanotis*.

During the Congress it was winter in South Africa although to us it seemed more like a Greek spring. Three Greeks, members of Societas Hellenica Herpetologica were present, beside the signer, Yiannis Ioannidis and Antigoni Kaliontzopoulou.

*Maria Dimaki*  
*The Goulandris Natural History Museum*  
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### **10th International Congress on the Zoogeography and Ecology of Greece and Adjacent Regions**

The Hellenic Zoological Society and the Section of Animal Biology of the Department of Biology (University of Patras) organized the 10th International Congress on the Zoogeography and Ecology of Greece and Adjacent Regions that took place between the 26th and the 30th of June, 2006.

The congress' scope included all issues related to the zoogeography and animal ecology of the eastern Mediterranean region. Research concerning all aspects of animal biodiversity (terrestrial, subterranean, freshwater and marine) within a geographical region that includes the Balkan and Italian peninsulas, Asia Minor and Anatolia, as well as the Near East and the Mediterranean coasts of northeastern Africa were welcome. Experience gained from the 9 previous successful congresses of this series during the last 30 years has shown that the meeting can become an important forum for contact and information exchange between scientists working on a wide range of subjects at a region with very high biodiversity.

Info on the congress, the agenda as well as the summaries of presentations and posters can be found in the website <http://www.upatras.gr/zoogeography/index.htm>. The site will also post updated information concerning all aspects, scientific and social, of the congress.

### **1st Mediterranean Herpetological Congress**

The 1st Mediterranean Herpetological Congress (CMH1) will be organised in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 16 - 20 April 2007. The initiative focused on the herpetofauna of Mediterranean Type ecosystems. The congress is planned to meet every 4 years in one of the 5 regions of the world Mediterranean-type ecosystems. The congress aims to address issues of biogeography, distribution, systematics, ecomorphology, physiology, as well as management issues and to promote the conservation of herpetofauna as an integral part of the natural heritage of the Mediterranean-type regions. It will also include a specialized workshop «Herps Trade and Conservation in Mediterranean-Type Ecosystems»

For more information please visit the webpage <http://www.ucam.ac.ma/cmh1>. Abstracts (in French or English) must be submitted to the Local Organizing Committee before October 31, 2006. Registration is open until 31 December 2006 (Registration Fees: 280€).

## Conservation issues

### **Greece is convicted by the European Court of Justice for failing to protect the Milos viper**

Milos viper (*Macrovipera schweizeri*) is an endemic species of western Cyclades. More than half of its population is found on Western Milos and it is also found on the islands of Sifnos, Kimolos and Poliaigos. It is a protected species and its collection, possession or killing is forbidden as well as the trade of living or dead individuals. Its protection status arises from Greek legislation (PD 67/81, Official Gazette 23 A/30-1-1981), the Bern Convention and the EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. Based on the Habitats Directive, the Milos Viper is a priority species on the European level, and as a result Greece proposed Natura 2000 sites for its conservation and protection. Nevertheless Greece did not take the necessary measures for the protection of the species and as a result the European Court of Justice condemned Greece on 16 March 2006 for having failed to establish and implement a strict protection system for the Milos Viper (case C-518/04).

The decision declares that "by failing to take the necessary measures for the establishment and application of an effective system of strict protection for the viper *Vipera schweizeri* on the island of Milos in order to avoid any deliberate disturbance of the species, particularly during the period of breeding, rearing and hibernation, and any deterioration or destruction of breeding sites or resting places, the Hellenic Republic has failed to fulfill its obligations under Article 12(1)(b) and (d) of Directive 92/43/EEC (1) on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora".

It should be noted that the need for protection measures was specified in the Special Environmental Study of Western Milos, as well as in the study for the Milos Viper that was implemented by the Goulandris Museum in the framework of the "Milos Viper's Habitat Project". As we also noted in SHH Newsletter 4, the project "Protection and Promotion of the Habitats and Species of the Milos Island Natura 2000 area" is implemented for the protection and management of the species.

Regardless of whether Greece had or not the legal obligation to establish protection measures for this endemic viper, it certainly had a moral one. An endemic species, once lost from its restricted area of distribution, it is lost forever. Endemic species are a valuable part of the natural heritage of a country and as such require the respective attention, regardless of whether they are cute, small, large, pretty or ugly ...

### **Greece fails to protect sea turtles**

Greece has yet to respond to its basic commitments for the long-term protection of the Laganas Bay, the most important nesting area of the sea turtle *Caretta caretta* in the Mediterranean. This was the main point of the NGOs ARCHELON, Society for the Protection of the Sea Turtle, MEDASSET – the Mediterranean association to save the sea turtles, and the international environmental NGO WWF, during the 5th Expert Meeting on Mediterranean Sea turtles.

The three NGOs stressed that Greece remains to the serious problems faced by the sea turtle *Caretta caretta* in Zakynthos. The Ministry of Environment avoids demolishing the numerous illegal buildings and tourist infrastructure that continue to degrade the protected nesting beaches. Additionally, instead of promoting solutions for the sustainable development of the area, it fails to propose and apply compensation measures for the owners that are affected by the Management Plans of the national marine Park of Zakynthos. Finally the Ministry of

Environment acts as a mere observer in front of the huge problems that threaten the existence of the National Park.

At the same time, Greece instead of applying its obligations as they stem from the ECJ decision of 2002 it fails to give significant and viable solutions in the problems that keep re-appearing during the last four years.

The three NGOs asked:

- The Greek Government to implement as a matter of urgency the administrative and legal framework in the Laganas Bay, in Zakynthos, and reduce the impact of tourist industry.
- The European Commission to defend the implementation of the European environmental legislation and add pressure towards Greek Government so as to implement effective protection measures for this unique biotope for the sea turtles.
- The international community of environmentalists to continue expressing its worries regarding the proper protection and function of the National marine Park of Zakynthos, to increase pressure towards the Greek Government in order for it to fulfill its international and national environmental obligations.

## **Other news**

### **EUFORA – European Forum for reptiles and amphibians**

The SHH was informed on the creation of EUFORA, a network that seeks to positively influence all European legislation regarding the active and practical participation in all aspects of herpetology, including conservation, welfare and husbandry.

EUFORA supports the concept of "sustainable use" as enshrined in the principles of IUCN (and as accepted by the EU), wishes to establish a consensus of agreed codes of best practice that identify minimum requirements concerning welfare and husbandry of amphibians and reptiles, encourages the exchange of information and cooperation between specialized reptile and amphibian veterinarians

You can get more information either from the EUFORA website: <http://www.eufora-net.org> (that however is under construction), or from Dr Henry Brames ([henry.brames@t-online.de](mailto:henry.brames@t-online.de)).