

# Herpetological observations on the Greek island of Lesbos

Jelle Hofstra  
Kerkewal 54  
NL-8401 CH Gorredijk  
The Netherlands  
[jelhofstr@planet.nl](mailto:jelhofstr@planet.nl)

Photos by the author

## INTRODUCTION

From May 9 through 24 of this year, my wife and I spent our vacation on the Greek island of Lesbos. Lesbos is situated 20 kilometers from the coast of Turkey and, with its 1630 km<sup>2</sup> surface area, it is the largest island in the Aegean Sea after Crete. It is especially renowned for its bird life and scores of birdwatchers of different nationalities are seen everywhere toting large spotting scopes and tripods. Relatives recommended that we stay in the fishing community of Skala Kalloni, located on the northern bay of Kalloni, since – apart from birds – they had also found many reptiles and amphibians in the area. The general terrain is fairly level and therefore perfectly navigable on a bicycle. The Steinfort family from Brielle, who had reconnoitred the area in a previous year and was visiting the island again together with us, provided us with a map of the general area, which demarcated the most suitable localities for reptiles and amphibians. This saved us a lot of aimless cruising the countryside to look for these animals. Upon our arrival, the island had been suffering from a spell of bad weather for several weeks, but luckily this changed on our first day there. Not a day passed that the temperature in the sun did not reach 40°C or more – temperatures that, according to the locals, are to be expected for the month of July. This excessive heat led to our decision to limit our exploits to the nearby area, at the most five or six kilometers from our vacation home, since the heat made bicycling and hiking unbearable after 11 AM.



## AMPHIBIANS

### Green Frog (*Rana spec.*)

Green Frogs are abundant around Skala Kalloni. Wherever there was water we would see and hear these frogs. Both at night and during the day we heard loud frog choruses. Two different types could clearly be distinguished. The main culprit was a large green frog, but which exact species of Green Frog is not yet clear. The German researcher Jörg Plötner reported to the editors of POD@RCIS (pers. comm.) that the mitochondrial DNA of these animals is similar to that of animals on the Anatolian mainland. The Lesbos Green Frog is definitely not the same as the typical Green Frog (*Rana ridibunda*). Therefore, we prefer to call it "*Rana spec.*"



The green frog (*Rana spec.*) on Lesbos shows a variable colour pattern.

In spite of the high temperatures the animals were often seen exposed to the burning sun for long periods of time. The frogs are variable in their coloration and we saw greenish, brownish, as well as spotted individuals. In a pond near a dumpsite we found thousands of recently metamorphosed froglets.

### European Tree Frog (*Hyla arborea*)



*Hyla arborea* enjoys basking.

Along the Kalloni Lake and in the nearby town of Metòchi we found several European Tree Frogs (*Hyla arborea*). Kalloni Lake is a small pond that – according to our standards – barely deserves the name ‘lake’. However, this seems to be season-dependent. The number of tree frogs that we found could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Initially we looked for these animals in the leaf axils or on the leaves of the bamboo-like reed (*Arundo donax*) that covers the shores of the lake. This is where these frogs can be found on Crete (HOFSTRA, 2000). On Lesbos, these animals appeared to be found more frequently in bushes where they would be easily overlooked because of their excellent

camouflage. After dark the number of frogs calling indicated they are in fact much more common than we could establish.

### Green and Brown Toads (*Bufo spec.*)

We searched extensively for the Green Toad (*Bufo viridis*), but because of the prolonged heat and concurring drought we were unable to find any of this species. We tried our luck in a few green houses – as we had in Crete – since the irrigation inside these vegetable and fruit farms creates a perfect climate for toads. When we showed locals illustrations of both animals, they were familiar with them but over and over they would shake their heads indicating that these animals were not around at this time of year. We did find two road killed toads. The Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*), which also occurs on the island and can reach a size almost twice that of our Dutch individuals, was unfortunately also not found.

## REPTILES

### LIZARDS

#### Balkan green lizard (*Lacerta trilineata*)



A pair of *Lacerta trilineata*.



A young *Lacerta trilineata*.

Reptiles were most commonly seen during our bike and hike tours. The most frequently seen was the brilliantly green Balkan Green Lizard (*Lacerta trilineata trilineata*). The Balkan Green Lizard inhabits various habitats. We found these animals in the garden of our apartment, in bushes, road sides, and on rock formations. As adults these animals measure 16-20 cm in snout-vent length and the largest subspecies (*L. t. major*) may reach a total length of 60 cm. Males are uniform green with a blue spot behind the jaws. Females have a pattern of light spots on the sides and conspicuous longitudinal light stripes on the back. Juveniles and subadults are brown and display a pattern of three or five light dorsal stripes. The Balkan Green Lizard is closely related to the Green Lizard (*Lacerta viridis*). Juvenile Green Lizards can be distinguished from those of the Balkan Green Lizard because the former have two or four light dorsal stripes, the latter show three or five.

## Snake-eyed Lacertid (*Ophisops elegans*)

We saw the Snake-eyed Lacertid (*Ophisops elegans*) much less frequently. However, wherever they do occur they appear to be quite common. We only observed this species on three occasions. This slender, up to 19 cm long, little lizard owes its common name to its fused eyelids. These form a transparent spectacle, in the same fashion as in geckos and snakes. These brown animals display a pair of dorsal stripes and two yellow lateral stripes and are not particularly fast-moving. They inhabit arid regions with either a rocky soil (like on the Greek islands) or a loamy soil, usually covered with sparse vegetation.

## Starred Agama (*Laudakia stellio*)



Habitat of *Laudakia stellio*.

I once read somewhere that apart from the British and some crazed dogs, no other living creature is crazy enough to bask in the sun during the hottest hours of the day. I would like to add the Starred Agama (*Laudakia stellio*) to this list. When all other animals had long retreated into a shaded refuge, this animal was still out basking happily on the scorched rocks. The Starred Agama is a member of the genus *Laudakia*, which is widespread in Africa and southwestern Asia. Only a single species enters Europe (ARNOLD, BURTON & OVENDEN, 1978).

Different subspecies of this animal range from the Arab Peninsula into Greece, reaching its westernmost distribution on Corfu. On the island of Lesbos, the subspecies *Laudakia stellio daani* is found. Adults may attain a total length of approximately 40 cm. The animals that we saw were fairly dark with cream spots on the back. These animals are capable of some color change. The skin on their back and sides is granular, and the tail is covered with heavily keeled scales. When disturbed, these shy lizards immediately retreated into rock crevices, only to reappear ten or so minutes later. Their diet appears to consist of large insects, such as cockroaches, beetles and grasshoppers, although soft fruit and flowers are eaten as well. Although the Starred Agama is famous for its head-bobbing behaviour, we never observed this.

## European Glass Lizard (*Ophisaurus apodus*)

Our first encounter with a European Glass Lizard (*Ophisaurus apodus thracicus*) was as a road kill on the edge of an unpaved road. The second one was seen crossing a paved road and was then grabbed by me. While on the road these animals are significantly slower, and since the islanders do not seem to obey any speed limits, such a road crossing could be potentially life threatening. The animal measured 104 cm in total length. The European Glass Lizard is a harmless, large legless lizard that may attain a size of nearly one and a half meters and can be as thick around as a child's arm. It superficially resembles a large Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*), but differs in having a lateral groove running the length of the body and by the presence of rudimentary limb buds on either side of the cloaca. These several millimeter-long buds are vestigial limbs, indicating that their ancestors once possessed functional limbs. We observed the longitudinal groove expand and close every time the animal breathed. The angular head is attenuate. The dorsal coloration is chestnut brown, whereas the head is often lighter. The scales are diamond-shaped. These animals are very rigid and stiff to the touch and lack the agility of a snake. Our individual turned out



The Scheltopusik, *Ophisaurus apodus*.



Hemipenes of *Ophisaurus apodus*.

to be a male, since it everted its paired reproductive organs (hemipenes) when we held it for photographing. The European Glass Lizard has a very large distribution range. These animals feed on snails – completely digesting their shells as well – but also eat slugs. In addition it reportedly eats hard insects, mice and, to a lesser extent, bird eggs. On rare occasions it has been observed eating lizards (GRZIMEK, 1973). Other authors actually mention its preference for lizards and even (venomous) snakes (LAŇKA & VÍT, 1992). Females produce white eggs with a soft shell. Juveniles are rarely seen since they lead a very secretive life. The adult animals, which swim surprisingly well and can remain submerged for long time periods, are active throughout the day and live in both flat terrain and in mountainous areas. Ben Steinfort (pers. comm.) found these animals at an elevation of 550-600 meters. Wherever this species occurs, it appears to be fairly common. Throughout our vacation we found two more road killed individuals.



*Hemidactylus turcicus* was found in the evening

### Turkish Gecko (*Hemidactylus turcicus*)

This species of gecko was observed at night on the walls of our apartment, perched in the shine of our outside lights. These are relatively slender geckos with large eyes and excellent vision. Their eyes are covered with a transparent 'spectacle' as is seen in snakes, and therefore they cannot close their eyes. The average length of adult animals ranges from 8-10 cm. Their color is light pink or cream, and their skin appears transparent. The skin feels velvety and is adorned with granular tubercles. These animals are capable of considerable color change and can adjust their skin coloration to match the color of the background. The Turkish Gecko is an adaptable species found wherever there are people. They can be seen near all kinds of lights, waiting for insects like cockroaches and beetles that are attracted to the light to come within range. These little lizards need to be handled carefully since they easily lose their tail.

## SNAKES

### Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*)

Formerly, numerous subspecies of the Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) were recognized. Their number has now been reduced to eleven (ARNOLD & OVENDEN, 2002). The subspecies occurring on Lesbos, *Natrix n. persa*, was only observed on three occasions. Twice we saw animals swimming, one of which was a particularly large animal, and another was seen looking for food on the edge of a ditch. All three animals displayed a pattern of two light longitudinal stripes, which ran the length of the body.

### Dice Snake (*Natrix tessellata*)

The Dice Snake (*Natrix tessellata*) was seen in a pond near Lake Kalloni. For a long time, seven individuals could be observed from a bridge swimming actively back and forth. The total length of those animals was an estimated 80 cm. They generally had a grey coloration with regular dark spots. However, the coloration of this species can be variable: brownish, yellowish, greenish, or even completely black animals are known. The pattern of spots can also vary or be entirely absent. This species is more aquatic than the Grass Snake. It spends most of its time in the water and can remain submerged for a long time. Its diet consists almost solely of fish.

### Large Whip Snake (*Coluber caspius*)

I encountered the Large Whip Snake (*Coluber caspius*) in the olive grove behind our apartment. Armed with my camera I was hunting lizards in the blazing heat (speaking of the British and crazed dogs...). When I heard some rustling in the tall grass and went exploring I noticed a snake's tail sticking out of a burrow. When I carefully started pulling the snake out, there did not appear to be an end to the animal's body. It turned out to be a Large Whip Snake with an estimated total length of 160 to 180 cm. This species may reach a length of 2.5 meters, making it one of the



*Coluber caspius*.

largest snakes in Europe. The color of its dorsum was yellowish-brown, the venter reddish. The head and jaws were reddish brown. This is a very fast-moving, diurnal snake. It lives in dry, open habitats with sparse vegetation, such as this olive grove, but also in more heavily vegetated areas with rocky slopes and stone walls. Adults eat mostly mammals, and in this case, probably the locally abundant mice. This species is a typical whip snake in that it instantly tried to bite me. I was having the hardest time holding the snake by the tail and trying to hold it away from my body. Time after time the snake raised its muscular body, opened its mouth and charged with lightning speed. Even though this species is not venomous, it can still deliver a nasty bite. A 60 centimeter long Balkan Whip Snake (*Coluber gemonensis*) had once bitten my little finger. The animal kept making chewing motions for as long as a full minute before it finally let go of me, and I could feel its teeth penetrating ever deeper and more painfully. Pulling away from a biting snake is not recommended because of the backward angle of their teeth. As an aside, the chewing snake and profusely bleeding finger did result in some nice video footage. The Large Whip Snake I was holding was almost three times as large; enough reason to keep a safe

distance. While my wife was observing the scene in distress from the patio hundreds of meters away, I eventually managed to photograph the angry whip snake with my free hand. Less than an hour later the poor snake was disturbed again when the owner of the olive grove started ploughing and removed all the obstacles in his way, including the corrugated iron, which had been the home of this snake for three years. The Greek farmer told me that locals do not kill these snakes because everybody seems to know what good rodent hunters they are.

### Montpellier Snake (*Malpolon monspessulanus*)

The only Montpellier Snake we found was a road killed individual. The animal measured 130 cm. Its dorsal coloration was bluish-grey, the venter was yellowish. Since the head was still virtually intact, identification was no problem. The narrow frontal plate, pronounced 'eye brows', large eyes, and the upper jaw that protrudes beyond the lower jaw, are all unmistakable characteristics. This species can be found in warm, dry habitat and it seems to prefer open rocky or sandy terrain, although it is also found in open woodland and agricultural areas. Like the previous species, this is an aggressive snake. Males may reach a length of two meters; females tend to stay smaller with a maximum size of 1.4 meters. This is a venomous snake that has enlarged fangs in the back of the mouth. When biting prey (lizards, snakes, and mammals), it has to deliver a calculated bite. Prey animals are usually killed within minutes. Bites in humans usually result in stiffness, paralysis and swelling at the site of the bite. Sometimes it results in fever. All of these symptoms usually disappear after a few hours (ARNOLD, BURTON & OVENDEN, 1978).

### Ottoman Viper (*Vipera xanthina*)

Against all expectations we also encountered an Ottoman Viper, *Vipera xanthina xanthina*. This snake ranges from west and central Anatolia roughly to Kayseri, and is locally found in Greek and Turkish Thracia and on some of the Greek islands. This species reaches a total length of 120 cm. Almost everywhere we went looking for reptiles, birders, who get up at the crack of dawn, had already moved through. Every morning the Kalloni Lake was overrun by birders, leaving reptiles hardly any solitude to bask. Since we were not expecting to find anything there, we decided to redirect our search efforts to a nearby pasture. Beneath the bushes that were lining the field we found a *Vipera xanthina* laying half in the sun and half in the shade. It was a massive animal with a total length of more than one meter and easily as big around as an adult man's wrist. The powerful triangular or heart-shaped head that is distinctly wider than the neck was clearly visible. The animal was grey with a dark zigzag stripe. The base color of these snakes can also be brown or sand-coloured. Just as in our native Adder (*Vipera berus*), males appear to have a more contrasting coloration than do females. The ventral surfaces apparently are grey or pinkish with a dark mottling or dark spots – although we decided not to verify this. *Vipera xanthina* is active during the day, but during the hotter times of the year it may become nocturnal. The animal is sluggish, but apparently attacks with great speed when pressed. As far as toxicity is concerned, it can be said that this is a very dangerous snake and a bite that is left untreated is potentially fatal. As in the Adder (*Vipera berus*), this species seems to be the cause of few snakebite incidents. Accidents are often the result of carelessness.

Since it was impossible to take a decent photograph of the animal in this position, I used the pole of my dip net – which I always carry along on my travels – to carefully separate the vegetation somewhat. Although the snake remained there for a little while and I was able to take a few pictures, I still could not help but think that the photographs were perhaps not yet perfect. We returned the next day to the same spot for a second try and we found a Large Whip Snake sitting where the viper had been sitting the day before. The viper was now situated less than a meter from the whip snake. Upon our approach the whip snake disappeared rapidly and before I could take a better picture of the viper, it too disappeared. Unfortunately, I did not see the viper again after that day.

## TURTLES

Instead of 'bird island', Lesbos could just as well be called 'turtle island'. Either this island is teeming with turtles and tortoises, or we were just extremely lucky and happened to be in the right places at the right times.

### Spur-thighed Tortoise (*Testudo graeca*)



*Testudo graeca*.

The Steinfort family recommended that we visit a narrow coastal strip of approximately one kilometer long and, at most, 100 meters wide where they had found several Spur-thighed Tortoises (*Testudo graeca*) the year before. The subspecies present on Lesbos is *Testudo graeca iberica*. *Testudo graeca* can be distinguished from Hermann's Tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*) by its usually undivided supracaudal scute, the presence of spurs on the thighs, and the absence of a horn spur on the tail tip. The dunes in the coastal strip we visited were covered in rushes and several different grasses, alternating with flowering chamomile and the prickly bushes of the euphorb *Euphorbia acanthothamnus*. Within this terrain

many bald and sandy spots were also present. Interestingly, the terrain was marked with many tunnels that perforated the soil – apparently produced by a mouse-like rodent with a short tail. Now and then our feet would crash through the roof of one of those tunnels and sink completely into the sand. As was the case in all of Lesbos, the area was heavily polluted with all kinds of garbage discarded by locals. On our first round we found no less than 17 specimens of *Testudo graeca iberica*. Because we were about to lose count and were worried that we would count the same individuals twice, we decided to mark the animals with a black waterproof marker. The marker appeared to be not as waterproof as its label led us to believe, and I suspect that combined with the wear on the turtle's shells, the markings will disappear in a matter of weeks. Our marking method consisted of colouring a marginal scute on the underside of each animal in black. In the end we managed to mark 60 animals in this fashion. There were undoubtedly several more animals out there that we did not mark as on our last day we discovered a male individual that we had not come across throughout the duration of our trip. It was striking that the population seemed to consist mostly of juveniles. The smaller individuals had a carapace length of about five centimeters, the larger ones measured about 14 cm. We could not determine the sex of the juveniles, but the subadult animals we encountered were all females. Only a single adult female was seen. It was a very dark and heavy animal with a carapace length of 23.5 cm. It appeared that the only male in the area was the animal we encountered on our last day.

This difference in sex ratio is probably explained by differential activity periods. In spring, males are searching for females, whereas females are more actively looking for suitable oviposition sites (Jaco Bruekers, pers. comm.). All of the tortoises that were observed looked well-fed, in spite of the many ticks seen on all of them, but particularly on the larger individuals. The ticks were not only attached to the soft parts of the animal, such as the neck, tail, and legs, but also in the sutures between the scutes. The best time to find the turtles seemed to be around 9:30 AM. The animals were basking or feeding at this time. Once the sun was at its highest position, far fewer tortoises could be seen. They would retreat into self-made burrows. We were thinking that perhaps they would simply use the



existing rodent burrows and widen them somewhat. They also seemed to look for shelter beneath the euphorb bushes (Steinfort, pers. comm.), although we never found them there. According to Joris Peeters (pers. comm.) they also appear to go under cover by trampling and flattening dry, tall grass and crawling underneath. Outside of this particular coastal strip we found two additional tortoises: a subadult individual, which we relocated from a busy road. We also found an adult male seen in a freshly mowed pasture. The latter animal was striking in that its thigh spurs had grown to a length of almost a centimeter.

### Balkan Terrapin (*Mauremys rivulata*)

Not a single body of water could be found that did not have Balkan Terrapins (*Mauremys rivulata*) in it. The splashes of fleeing turtles could be heard everywhere, even in the smallest of ditches. On our first day on Lesbos we counted no less than 40 Balkan Terrapins in a small ditch approximately 200 meters in length and not even a meter and a half wide that runs along a public road. Numerous animals were basking and slid into the water upon our approach. These bodies of water are far from clean and the bottom was generally very muddy, so that the escaping turtles would leave a cloud of mud particles behind them. Usually these ditches were full of aquatic vegetation. Wherever duckweed was present it not only supplied food but also great cover. Several days later, during a recount of the same ditch, we realized that we had previously only counted about half of the turtles present. The stream running behind our apartment was also home to many of these animals. Two adult females were caught by hand without too much effort as they tried to escape into the shaded side of the stream, which happened to be the side I was standing on. The larger of the two animals measured 21 cm in carapace length. Kalloni Lake in particular seemed a true paradise for Balkan Terrapins. Literally hundreds of these turtles were basking there. We also noticed a number of basking juveniles that barely reached a carapace length of two centimeters. These animals eat both vegetable matter and other animals, and are far from picky in their diet. We even visited a spot where the turtles are frequently fed pieces of bread by vacationers. The animals were so used to this that upon our arrival they paddled over to us in large numbers.



Subadult *Mauremys rivulata*.



A basking *Emys orbicularis*.

### European Pond Terrapin (*Emys orbicularis*)

The European Pond Terrapin (*Emys orbicularis*) was observed with less frequency than any of the other turtle species. It is a fairly dark-coloured turtle with a radiated or spotted pattern of yellow markings. Depending on subspecies and age, their shell can display an almost continuous range from a uniform dark coloration to a brightly radiated pattern. The usually lighter coloured plastron contains a moveable transverse hinge, which enables the plastron to move to some extent. However, this mechanism is not nearly as effective as in the famous box turtles (e.g. the genera *Cuora* and *Terrapene*). At the moment, some 13-15

subspecies are being recognized – depending on different authors. The subspecies that occurs on Lesbos is *Emys orbicularis hellenica*. Although it is often said that *Emys orbicularis* prefers quiet, clear lakes, on Lesbos it was frequently seen sharing its habitat with *Mauremys rivulata*, the latter after all is often found in fairly dirty waters. Even in the more or less polluted stream mentioned earlier I succeeded in catching a European Pond Terrapin. It was a beautiful male individual with a carapace length of 13 cm. Generally, these animals are very shy and immediately dive into the water when disturbed, much more readily than would *Mauremys rivulata*. In Kalloni Lake these two species also shared their habitat, and *Emys orbicularis* was seen on logs, basking comfortably between *Mauremys rivulata*. On one occasion, a juvenile was seen that had an estimated carapace length of three centimeters.

### Marginated Tortoise (*Testudo marginata*)

We also paid a visit to the 'Lesbian Wildlife Hospital', located in the town of Agia Paraskevi, which is not far from the capital Mitylini. A Dutch couple, Joris and Ineke Peeters-Lenglet, run the hospital. Apart from caring for all sorts of injured and sick animals like reptiles, birds, and mammals, they have the facilities to perform surgery. It is also a sanctuary for turtles and tortoises, including a beautiful female Marginated Tortoise, *Testudo marginata*. According to the owner of the hospital this animal originates from the island. This species is found sporadically, and the sixth, most recent, report of this species came from the town of Molivos, located in the far northwest of the island. I was unable to find anything about this in the literature and *Testudo marginata* is not exactly an animal that is easily overlooked.



Is *Testudo marginata* introduced on Lesbos?

Therefore I am more inclined to think that these animals are introduced. For the last three years the hospital has been producing baby turtles that are hybrids of *Testudo marginata* and *Testudo graeca iberica*. Unfortunately, it is their intention to eventually release these hybrids on the island, which is a deplorable plan. If *Testudo marginata* does occur naturally on Lesbos then a strictly enforced and tightly regulated breeding program would be the only realistic way to salvage the island's population.

### ANIMALS NOT FOUND

Of course it would have been too good to be true if we would have encountered every species of amphibian and reptile found on Lesbos within our two week vacation. This was not to be expected during such a brief visit.

Literature (KASAPIDES et al., 1996) shows that, in addition to the species observed, the following reptiles are found on Lesbos: Kotschy's Gecko (*Cyrtopodion kotschyi*), Snake-eyed Skink (*Ablepharus kitaibelii*), Sand Boa (*Eryx jaculus*), Worm Snake (*Typhlops vermicularis*), Dahl's Whip Snake (*Coluber najadum*), Leopard Snake (*Elaphe situla*) and Dwarf Snake (*Eirenis modestus*).

## ROAD KILLS

We counted the road kills that were of note during our short trips. Within 13 days the following animals were found dead on roads: *Bufo viridis* (2); *Rana spec.* (4); *Lacerta trilineata* (4); *Ophisaurus apodus* (4); *Natrix tessellata* (4); *Coluber caspius* (2); *Malpolon monspessulanus* (2); unidentified snakes (2); *Mauremys rivulata* (4); *Testudo graeca iberica* (1). Twenty-nine dead animals were seen in total.

## SUMMARY

In May 2003 the temperature on the Greek island of Lesbos was unseasonably high and not a drop of rain fell. Most likely that was the reason why no toads (*Bufo bufo* and *Bufo viridis*) were found. Green Frogs (*Rana spec.*) were abundant. The Common Tree Frog (*Hyla arborea*) was observed in low numbers. In terms of lizards, Balkan Green Lizards (*Lacerta trilineata*) were the most common; much less frequently observed were the Snake-eyed Lacertid (*Ophisops elegans*) and the Turkish Gecko (*Hemidactylus turcicus*). In addition, we report the presence of the Starred Agama (*Laudakia stellio*) and European Glass Lizard (*Ophisaurus apodus thracicus*). We encountered five species of snakes: Montpellier Snake (*Malpolon monspessulanus*), Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix persa*); Dice Snake (*Natrix tessellata*); Large Whip Snake (*Coluber caspius*) and Ottoman Viper (*Vipera xanthina*). Turtles and tortoises were abundant. In a narrow coastal strip no less than 60 Spur-thighed Tortoises were seen. Balkan Terrapins (*Mauremys rivulata*) were found in nearly every body of water, occasionally together with European Pond Terrapins (*Emys orbicularis*). The latter species was observed with significantly less frequency. The 'Lesbian Wildlife Hospital' is currently breeding a once wounded female Marginated Tortoise (*Testudo marginata*), which is being crossed with a male *Testudo graeca*. The hybrid young born from this pair are unfortunately released on the island.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our thanks to Ben and Foekje Steinfort who were most helpful during our search for reptiles and amphibians. Joris Peeters I wish to thank for critically reading this manuscript, and Jaco Bruekers for providing helpful comments on the Spur-thighed and Marginated Tortoise sections.

## LITERATURE

- ARNOLD, E. N., J. A. BURTON & D. W. OVENDEN, 1978. Elseviers Reptielen- en Amfibieëngids. Elsevier, Amsterdam/Brussel.
- ARNOLD, E.N. & D.W. OVENDEN, 2002. A field guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of Britain and Europe. Harper Collins Publishers, London.
- AXIÓTIS, M., 1995. De fauna van Lesbos (2nd ed.). Gutenberg, Mytilini. [Dutch; translated from the Greek.]
- BUTTLE, D., 1995. Reptiles and amphibians of the Greek Islands. Reptilian. 3(7): 15-25.
- GRZIMEK, B., 1973. Het leven der dieren. Deel VI: Reptielen. Het Spectrum, Utrecht/Antwerpen.
- HOFSTRA, J., 2000. Some herpetological observations on Crete. POD@RCIS 1: 10-17. <http://www.podarcis.nl>
- KASAPIDES, P., S. PROVATIDOU, P. MARAGOU & E.D. VALAKOS, 1996. Neue Daten über die Herpetofauna von Lesbos (Ägäischen Inseln, Griechenland) und einige biogeographische Bemerkungen über die Inseln des nordöstlichen ägäischen Archipels. Salamandra 32: 171-180.
- LAŇKA, V. & Z. VÍT, 1992. Amfibieën en Reptielen. Reis door de natuur. Rebo Productions, Lisse.