



Dear DGHT members, in 2020 we started to summarize some of the main articles of our elaphe journal in English, for our non-German speaking members. These summaries have been compiled by Beate Pfau & Axel Kwet.

### Social Distancing in Greece. Introduction to this special elaphe on herping in Greece

by Heiko Werning

The special topic of this elaphe is inviting herpers to come to Greece. It is quite convenient to come over from Italy by car ferry, and Greece is perfect for combining family vacations on the beach, sightseeing in the ancient sites of Olympia and Delphi, or mountain hiking with herpetological interests.

The summer vacation took six weeks, beginning early in July, and it started from the port of Igoumenitsa south-



*Testudo marginata* from Mount Olympus Photo: H. Werning

ward, to the Peloponnese peninsula, in order to avoid the heat of the later summer months. After visiting several natural and historical highlights they headed northward, crossed the canal of Korinthos and proceeded to Athens, and from there to the island of Milos. Then the family climbed the Olympus, visited the Chalcidice peninsula and saw the Athos monasteries from a distance (see also the very funny story "Brutkasten" on the last pages of



*Triturus macedonicus* Photo: H. Werning

this elaphe). The last locations of this round trip were lake Prespa and the Pindos mountains. The narrative is full of herp observation hints, and of beautiful and interesting photographs, and before planning an own family trip to Greece the article should be read completely.

### Searching for vipers across mainland Greece in the summer with the Corona virus

by Thomas Bamann, Ines Aust & Dominik Hauser

The authors had been in Greece already in 2019 for searching reptiles and amphibians, and they wanted to come again in 2020 to find those species which they had not found at that excursion. Travelling was restricted in 2020, due to the Corona virus pandemic, but they managed to book flights to Preveza, a smaller airport at the western coast, for the end of August 2020. It would not be the optimum season for this second herpetological trip, because the excursion target was to find all the four venomous snake species of mainland Greece, which would be difficult in the hot summer months.



*Testudo graeca ibera* from Evros Delta Photo: T. Bamann

The itinerary first led them to the Pindos mountains to find the Greek meadow viper (*Vipera graeca*), then to the delta of the river Pinios and on Mount Olympus, for the Eastern sand viper (*Vipera ammodytes meridionalis*). The next station were the biotopes of the Rock viper (*Mon-*



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*tivipera xanthina*), in Northeast Greece, to the region of Alexandropoli, and the fourth species, the Balkan cross



*Vipera berus bosniensis* near Lake Prespa Photo: T. Bamann

adder (*Vipera berus bosniensis*) was expected in the Prespa mountain range. The itinerary continued to the Strofilia Forest at Kalogria, on the Gulf of Corinth, where the team hoped for the Western sand viper (*Vipera ammodytes ammodytes*), but that viper could not be found during this excursion. The last days were spent on the Feneos plateau.

This paper is a typical report on a herpetological excursion, and it contains lots of information on how to travel in this region and how to find amphibians and reptiles – and other animals, too. The paper is meant as an invitation to herpetologists to come to Greece and enjoy the landscape, meet the people, and find and photograph all kinds of plants and animals.

### Costa Navarino, today and ten years ago – a critical report

by **Antonia Beuttner**

The Gialova lagoon and the surrounding sand dunes had once, ca. 1997, been declared as a Natura 2000 Special Protected Area, which was managed from Pylos, a small city south of the lagoon. The faunistic research revealed

many rare and endangered species, among them the African chamaeleon. In 2005, a project, which was managed by the Hellenic Ornithological Society, has been initiated in order to protect the resident rare birds of Costa Navarino, as the area has been called by the tourist managers. Of course the project should also manage the habitat of the reptiles and amphibians as well, and especially the population of *Chamaeleo africanus* which is the only known occurrence of this species in Europe, should be counted and special protection measures should be implemented. Many German volunteers had helped with the project, and they were thrilled by the beauty of the area, among them the partner of this paper's author. The project was closed down in autumn 2009. Ten years later the author and her partner decided to visit the area again. Text and photos vividly depict the dramatic decline of habitat and the excessive use of the beautiful land area and the lagoon for unsustainable tourism-related measures like soil compaction for canteens and car parking lots, cutting off the natural water supply, and removing the information signposts

in order to create better car access. Picnicking and littering, jet-skiing in the lagoon, and off-road quad biking in the dunes are the favourite pastimes of the tourists, and a management plan for the area is lacking. Actual information can be found on the internet when using the area code GR2550004 for searching.

The article has a little happy ending, since, as the team knew how to find hidden chamaeleons, they succeeded in finding a few males, juveniles and even pregnant females within the officially protected area.



Juvenile *Chamaeleo africanus* Photo: A. Beuttner



## It's a great crested newt! - Can't you tell!" Teaching species knowledge of native amphibians in a primary school

by **Lina Randelzhofer**

The author is an elementary school teacher and planned lessons on amphibians for nine-year old children as a part of her exam thesis. Within six 90 minute lessons, the kids learned as much as possible on the taxonomy and natural history of amphibians in their proximity, and should be inspired to gather more information as well as to observe these fascinating animals themselves. The school, where the author had been working, is in south-western Germany, where nineteen amphibian species occur naturally.



Different amphibian posters have been created  
Photo: L. Randelzhofer

For the lessons common, conspicuous and easy-to-watch species have been selected: The fire salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*) and the great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) were available as realistic models, and models of

smooth newts (*Lissotriton vulgaris*), alpine newts (*Ichthyosaura alpestris*) and several other species were used, too. The common frog (*Rana temporaria*), common toad (*Bufo bufo*), European tree frog (*Hyla arborea*) and yellow-bellied toad (*Bombina variegata*) were chosen as anuran characters. Before and after the class a quiz regarding the knowledge about the identification of amphibian species had to be taken. In the first lesson the children should get familiar with the amphibians. The children were allowed to touch the models and learned how to describe and identify the different amphibian species. As a highlight of the first lesson, the children observed living amphibians in little terraria, and their favourite animals were the fire salamanders which could be watched eating one worm after the other. Later the animals were released, and it was explained that these animals are strictly protected and must not be disturbed in their natural habitat. In the second and third lesson the children learned about amphibian biology. Finally

the children used the remaining three lessons to create dioramas of amphibian habitats and posters displaying information about the different species inhabitants.

This article is a vivid and sympathetic description of the experiences with teaching amphibian natural history to young children, and it is recommended that preschool and elementary school teachers as well as persons caring for children in holiday camps should get the whole text, because they will certainly benefit from the detailed hints in this paper.

## Research section: List of new amphibian species described in 2020

by **Axel Kwet**

Since 2006 the amphibian list is the main part of the research section of the elaphe number 2 of each year. 186 taxa (182 full species plus four subspecies) of amphibians were described in 2020, which brings the number of accepted amphibian taxa up to about 8280 taxa (as far as known until January 2021).



*Tylototriton pasmansi* Photo: C.T. Pham

Among the 24 new Urodela taxa there are five new *Tylototriton* species (one with two subspecies). The

genus *Tylototriton* had been newly listed in CITES Appendix II at the CITES CoP18, and these new species have also been added to the list for our report for the BfN "Evaluation of the Captive Breeding Potential of selected Amphibian Reptile Taxa included in Appendices I and II at CITES CoP18", which is scheduled to appear in autumn 2021.

Most of the 162 new Anuran taxa are inconspicuous brown frogs, with the Goose frogs (Megophryidae) with 30 new taxa from China, described from genetic differences, which means that they now occupy rank 1 in our table on new amphibian taxa. Remarkable from an herpetoculture point of view are for example the two new Harlequin toad

*Atelopus manauensis* Photos: A. Kwet





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species (*Atelopus manauensis* and *A. moropukaqumir*), which are both already considered as endangered by habitat destruction and by the chytrid fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, which has been implicated in the extinctions of other *Atelopus* species, and which has been detected in some of the sampled individuals, too. Since it is difficult but possible to breed Harlequin toads in captivity, it could be reasonable to establish an ex-situ breeding project, along with the certainly urgent conservation measures in their natural habitats. Other remarkable new species are the Glass frogs *Nymphargus colomai* and *N. lindae*, which are also already considered as endangered, but not due to overcollection for the pet trade as some animal rights organisations postulate, but rather because of habitat destruction and climate change.



*Nymphargus lindae* is a nocturnally active frog Photo: J.M. Guayasamin

The major part of the article is a species table, which has already been

described in more detail in the abstracts document to *elaphe* 02/2020. In the actual *elaphe* this table runs over 19 pages.

should be rather high, and roosts should be integrated in different distances to the heat source into the coating of the rear panel. Thick branches will also be used as resting places and lookouts. Of course the snakes will need a water bowl for drinking, which should be large enough so that the snakes can submerge themselves, especially on hot days. Adults usually grow to 150 cm total length, the maximum is at about 220 cm, the minimum size requirements for the terrarium are, accordingly, 150 x 75 x 150 cm (length x width x height). The yellow rat snake occurs along the US Atlantic coast, from North Carolina into Florida, and the terrarium climate should be emulated accordingly. Feeding is easy with freshly killed or thawed frozen rats and mice, and frozen, thawed day-old chicks are accepted as well. Reproduction may even occur within the terrarium, but for better hatching results it is recommended to incubate the eggs separately. The young snakes are grey with a darker blotch pattern, they will change colour slowly into the adult yellowish, striped coloration. Yellow rat snakes are attentive and attractive terrarium animals which do not require particularly complex technical equipment for good species-specific husbandry conditions.

## Keeping and breeding the Yellow Rat snake (*Pantherophis obsoletus quadrivittata*)

by Matthias Eurich

In the "herpetoculture" part of this *elaphe* the author stands up for rat snakes as terrarium animals. Yellow rat snakes are usually attentive and inquisitive, and rather quiet. Only if disturbed seriously they will hiss and attempt to bite, but if they are handled by an experienced person they will quickly calm down again. Since they are arboreal the terrarium



Female *Pantherophis obsoletus quadrivittata* Photo: K. Klier-Heil

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