

The marginated tortoise, with its restricted range, represents a rare species; as such it signifies importance for our country and its fauna.

Testudo graeca iberica (Pallas, 1814)

Materials: 2 females. Two specimens which we have collected within our territory exhibit those characteristics which belong to *T. graeca*: an undivided supracaudal plate; on the sides of the thighs there are large, prominent, horny tubercles (in comparison with surrounding scales). There are further inconsistencies: the tip of the tail has a nail; the interpectoral seam is not twice as small as the interfemoral. Insofar as the data are supportive with the small number of specimens in our collection, the status of this species remains doubtful, though leaning towards validating *T. graeca*.

Caretta caretta caretta (Linnaeus, 1758)

Materials: 3 males and 1 female. The largest specimen has a length of 800 mm (1000 mm, Angel, 1946).

This marine turtle occurs in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. From time to time it is caught in the nets of fishing vessels. We found two specimens (one at Kune and one at Curila) dead on the beach.

In the scientific collection of the Museum of Natural Sciences there is one specimen representing the largest species of turtle in Albania, *Dermochelys coriacea* (Linnaeus, 1758).

CONCLUSION

Of the six species of chelonians defined herein, one (*T. marginata*) does not appear in the literature (Mertens and Wermuth, 1960; Schreiber, 1912) as belonging to the herpetofauna of our country. Supported by the material gathered and that closely observed in nature, the most common chelonian species are *T. hermanni* and *E. orbicularis*: conversely, *D. coriacea* and *T. marginata* have a very limited geographical distribution.

Testudo hermanni is an economically useful species for our country, whereas both the freshwater species may be harmful, though on a small scale, to commercial fish farms. *Testudo marginata* represents a rare species and as such is of scientific importance to the fauna of Albania.

SUMMARY

In this article the results of studies on the turtles of Albania over the years 1976-1983 are presented. The article is an account of six species of turtles, one of which (*T. marginata*) is recorded for the first time for the herpetofauna of Albania. This work also presents bioecological data as well as the geographical distribution of the six Albanian species of chelonians.

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Current Data on the Chelonians of Albania

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Further research carried out between 1985 and the present in many parts of Albania has led to a deeper understanding of the bioecology and ethology of its native chelonian species. A summary of these findings is presented here. Whereas all species as a group are ignored by wildlife authorities and seldom given a second thought by common people, both aquatic species *Emys orbicularis* and *Mauremys caspica* continue to be considered as pests by casual fishermen and commercial fisheries alike. With the recent increase of motor vehicles within Albania, we have found increasing numbers of hatchling and juvenile specimens crushed on roads.

Testudo hermanni boettgeri remains widespread in Albania and good populations persist in many regions, as indicated by their relative abundance and the presence of all size classes. The most important geographic regions for the species are as follows.

1. Shengjini Mountains near Lezha, where the dominant vegetation consists of broom (*Spartium junceum*), pomegranate (*Punica granatum*), bramble bush (*Palurus spinacristi*), dogwood (*Cornus mas*), hornbeam (*Carpinus orientalis*), and oaks (*Quercus pubescens*).

2. Divjaka, a coastal lowland sanctuary west of Lushnja where various species of pine (*Pinus halapensis*, *P. maritima*, and *P. pinea*) predominate.

3. Taraboshi Hills near Shkodra, a stony region where shrubs such as *Punica granatum* and *Rubus ulmifolius* are common.

4. The vicinity of Libohova, in rocky hills on the southeast side of the Dropulli Valley in southwestern Albania.

Recent documentation of the reproductive behavior of *T. hermanni boettgeri* includes two observations on a shrub-covered hillside near Vora, 12 km west of Tirana. I observed copulating *T. hermanni* on the afternoon of 9 May 1995 when the ambient temperature was 18°C. On 25 May 1995 a female was observed excavating a nest into which she deposited three eggs.

Crushed young tortoises on roads now appear more commonly than a few years ago, as with the aforementioned aquatic species. Juvenile and adult specimens with anthropogenic carapace damage are encountered in both relatively undisturbed and disturbed habitats such as orchard terraces (Fig. 1). Some tortoises are killed wantonly by shepherds or by other people, particularly in central Albania.

There is very little consumption of *Testudo* (or other chelonians) within Albania. My reference to their edibility in the 1985 work was in response to the urging by Communist authorities at the time that I include commentary on the economic utility of each species. Since the collapse of that regime there have been reports of small-scale smuggling of

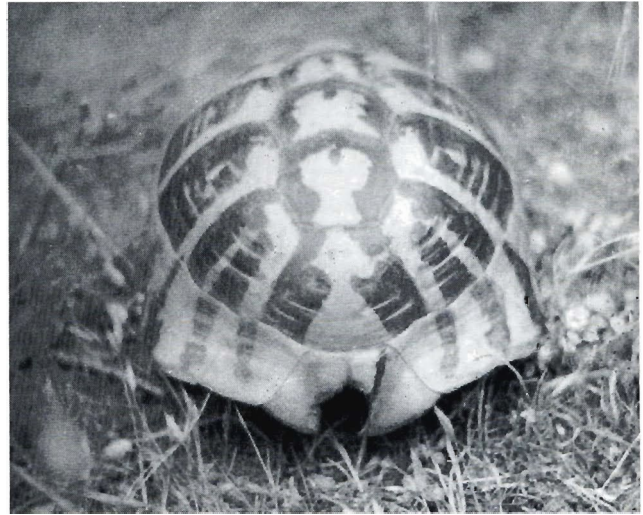


Figure 1. Female *Testudo hermanni boettgeri* from Vora hills showing evidence of anthropogenic shell damage. Photo by I. Haxhiu.

the three common species by economic refugees arriving in southern Italy, where there remains a market for live turtles and tortoises destined for human consumption. It is hoped that the enactment of wildlife preservation laws and public education will curtail this practice, as well as cruelty towards chelonians and their senseless killing.

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