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Malta, 3. – 6.4.2015

316 km², 425,000 inhabitants, more than 200,000 cars and an own lizard species – these are the major facts of this island country at the southern end of Europe. Easy to guess what was the main target of our journey - we did what we were expected to do: The following report is focused on the rather neglected Maltese Wall Lizard as this pretty species really deserves this kind of platform. Thanks to Leonard Zammit and Guido Bonett for the hospitality!

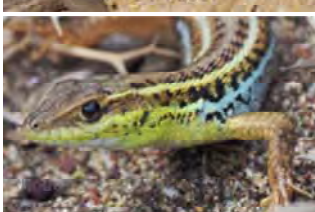


Here we go: *Podarcis filfolensis* in the old town of La Valletta

3.4. – Urban Lizarding

Isolated rocks in the Mediterranean have proved to be worthwhile goals for our lizard excursions many times. However, Malta is an isolated rock that has been successfully populated by *Homo sapiens* during the last 6000 years. Hence, *Homo sapiens* has shaped the appearance of this island significantly. Today, the centuries-old fortification walls of the human settlements are excellent habitats for the Maltese Wall Lizard (*Podarcis filfolensis*) which shares its biotope with numerous British, Japanese and other tourists of many nationalities. Right after our arrival we visited this anthropomorphic habitat in La Valletta in the afternoon. Here we could confirm the occurrence of *Podarcis filfolensis* in syntopy with *Homo sapiens* and *Felis silvestris catus*.

After this first scientific excursion we allowed ourselves an opulent dinner at a typical "Wine Bar" (the British interpretation of Mediterranean food there). After dinner we met up with Leonard (with whom we had spent a week on the Greek island of Kythira in 2011) and his wife, and they took us for a nocturnal sightseeing tour over the island.



In urban habitats *Podarcis filfolensis* often has no dark markings



This species has quite variable patterns: Frequently, there are Concolor-morphs...



...specimen with contrasting patterns are rather rare



Urban lizarding...

4.4. – An all-include nature trip

At 9:30 a.m. Leonhard and Guido (an author of various nature guides of Malta) picked us up for a trip to the neighbouring island of Gozo: a true full-service nature trip – crossing from Malta to Gozo by ferry almost smells like holiday! On Gozo, Leonard took us to a plateau on a spectacular cliff, which is densely populated by Maltese Wall Lizards. In addition, there were geckos (*Tarentola mauritanica*), very shy skinks (*Chalcides ocellatus*), a small pond with tadpoles of *Discoglossus pictus* (*Discoglossus pictus*) and a *Hierophis viridiflavus* (Green whip snake) which unfortunately escaped. Guido also proofed as an expert of the local orchid flora and endemic Maltese plants. In the afternoon we had some snacks and refreshments at a popular tourist beach and then we took the ferry back to Malta. There, we had a stopover in a habitat where we supposed to find chameleons (*Chamaeleo chamaeleon*). Finally, Leonard discovered at least one specimen and so we had a perfect day!



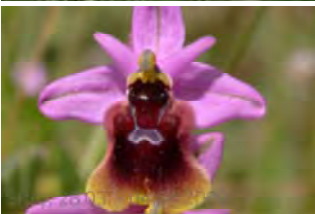
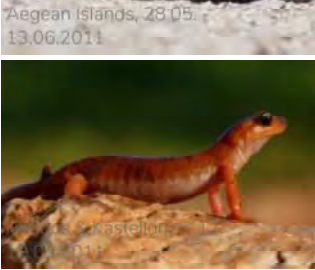
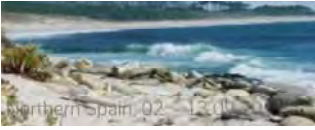
Ferry ride to Gozo, passing Comino and Cominetto



Andalucia, 10. - 18.03.2012



Why are these lizards so speedy?



Leonard and Guido



On Gozo, Podarcis filfolensis has a more contrasting pattern as on Malta



Male with reddish throat



Pair



Another male with contrasting pattern



Lizarding!!!



Trying to take a picture of the endemic *Matthiola incana melitensis*



Lavatera arborea

Greetings from Gozo



Almost like holiday!



Chamaeleo chamaeleon

5.4. – Exclusive Podarcis filfolensis Home Story

Easter Sunday: At our morning sightseeing tour it turned out that the locals apparently avoid going to the old town of the capital. Instead, it was populated by tourists and cruise passengers busy taking pictures of themselves or their beloved ones. We left the old town and went to a somehow shabby park on the outskirts. There, we wasted 10 minutes searching for Algerian whip snakes (*Hemorrhois algirus*). This introduced species from North Africa is supposed to occur in this park, but as far as we know there have been no records since 2007 (and also our short visit did not change this - probably the last specimens are in Belgian terrariums, meanwhile ;-). We left the park quickly to visit a neighbouring old cemetery, whose tombs are the habitat of lizards and skinks. We were quite surprised by *Chalcides ocellatus*: a widespread species we had seen many times before but never succeeded to take in-situ pictures of these shy critters. Here in La Valletta, the animals were easy to photograph – lying relaxed on the grave stones like thick cigars. Afterwards we went to another city park where we had the opportunity to produce a comprehensive home story with the Maltese Wall Lizards: Eating, Fighting, Friendship & Love – our exclusive look behind the scenes revealed everything! After this exciting lizard photo shooting, we really enjoyed our evening beer on a bench in the park...



This cemetery is inhabited by:



Chalcides ocellatus



Another one



Read our exclusive Podarcis filfolensis Home Story: A good looking male – He was single, unfortunately



Another beautiful guy...



...and he's not alone!



Also this handsome male...



...has a partner –



...and appetite – yummie, ants!



Another male...



Enjoying a good meal: young lizards are very tasty...



...his partner nips to him.



„I'm in love...“



....with this girl..."



....she's a little bit shy".



This guy has strange friends: „Hi fellow, how are you?"



„Baby, you're so cute“...



...great feelings...



...true romance.



Evening beer...

6.4. - Finale with geckos and skinks

Leonard picked us up for a last morning excursion and we went into a valley where we expected to find *Discoglossus pictus*: At a small stream with several pools we found a lot of tadpoles but still no adults. On the dry stone walls in this valley we came across numerous geckos and skinks which once again proved to be great photo models. Finally Leonard found some young *Discoglossus* who had just completed the metamorphosis. Then he took us to the airport and so our short stay on this island already came to an end.

Somewhere here must be *Discoglossus*...



Handbag-Herping



First, we found several geckos (*Tarentola mauritanica*) ...



... and skinks (*Chalcides ocellatus*) - Yes: In-situ shots of this species are possible!



Skink



Skink



Finally, a young *Discoglossus pictus*



Ready for boarding!

The home of European lizards - by Birgit & Peter Oefinger!