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Lefkada, Kefalonia & Akarnania, 24.5. - 3.6.2014

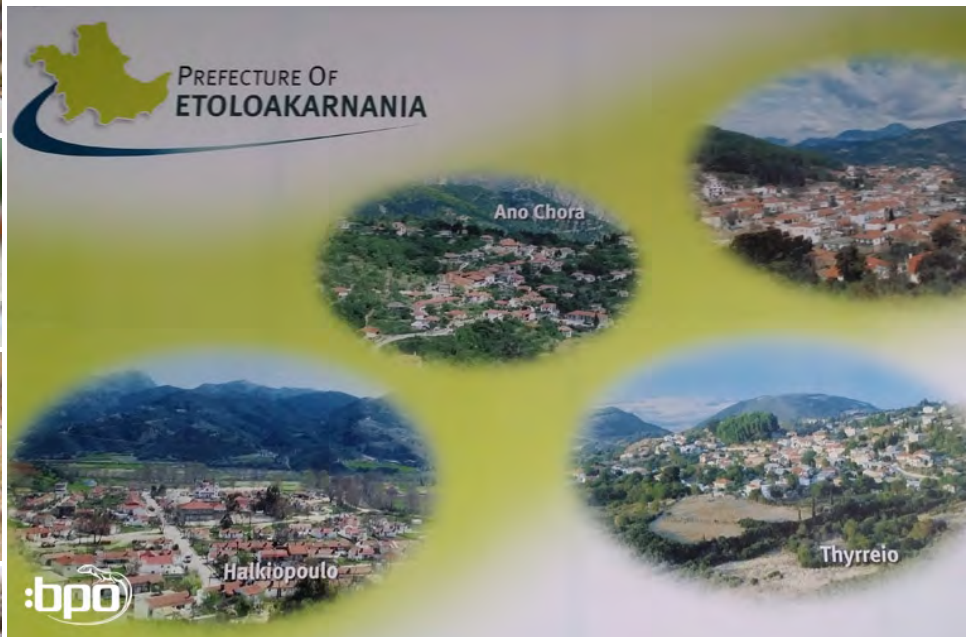
Algyroides nigropunctatus kephalliticius is a subspecies of the Dalmatian *Algyroides* which can be found on the Ionian Islands of Kefalonia, Lefkada and Ithaka. These lizards are relatively unknown: a fact which piqued our curiosity. Hence, a complete field trip dedicated to this subspecies? Rather nerdy – and the perfect plan for us! Here are our adventures. Thanks to Peter Keymar, Ilias Strachinis & Matt Wilson.



Here we go: Approaching Preveza-Airport with view over the Amvrakian Gulf and the mountains of Akarnania in the background

24.5.

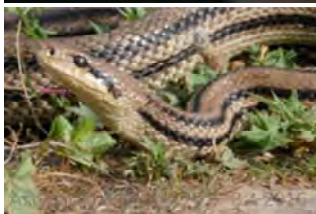
As if it was made for us, there are direct flights from Düsseldorf to Preveza in the Etoloakarnania Prefecture – an area we had never heard about before (like most people, probably) but the perfect starting point for our *Algyroides* trip. After a scenic flight over Montenegro, Albania and Northern Greece we arrived at our destination in the evening. In the baggage claim area, huge posters praised the beauty of Etoloakarnania. But we didn't get weak and followed our plan to visit Lefkada first. Fortunately, the island is connected to the mainland by a bridge, so our brave rental car brought us to Nidri, our first station, within one hour. There, our visit of a Tavern in the evening was rewarded by delicious calamari and the sighting of our first reptile (*Tarentola mauritanica*) – a pleasant start.



High expectations...

25.5.

Near Nidri there is a waterfall, which attracts lots of tourists. But, to our surprise, we realized that the tourists do not visit this place because of the *Algyroides* – unbelievable! We were excited seeing these legendary lizards and started our first photo session. At noon it became hot and we decided to spend some hours at the beach. In the afternoon, we visited another *Algyroides* habitat.



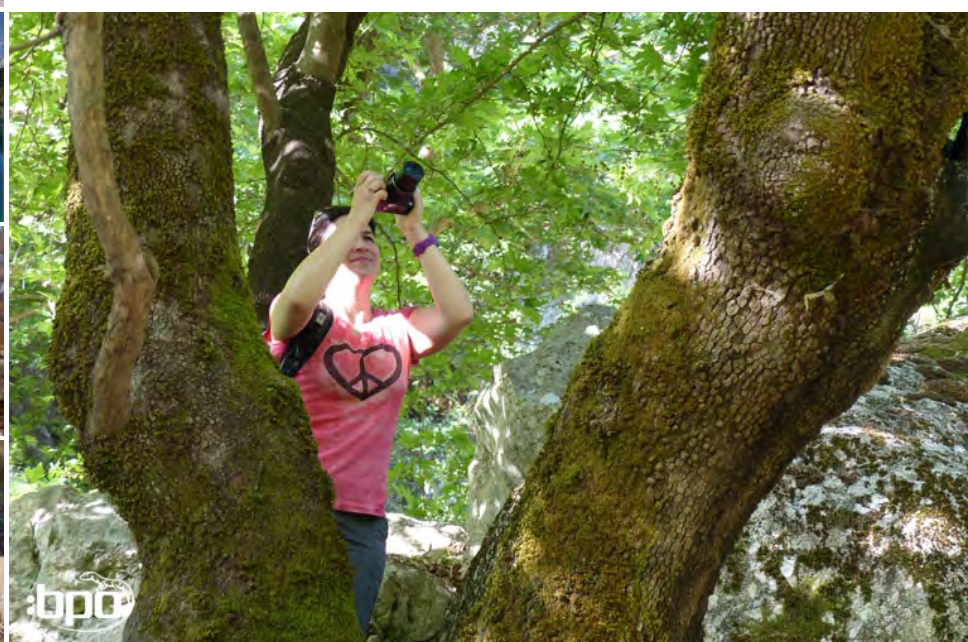
In fact, we were able to get a clear idea of these lizards during these days. Therefore, we would like to use the opportunity to tell the truth about some myths of *Algyroides nigropunctatus kephallithacius* in this report, subsequently.



The cascade of Nidri, a popular tourist attraction

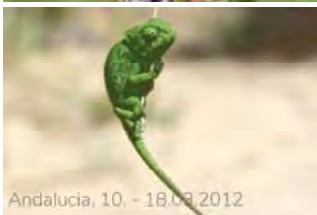


Happy frogs (*Pelophylax ridibundus*)





Birdwatching?



Andalucia, 10. - 18.03.2012

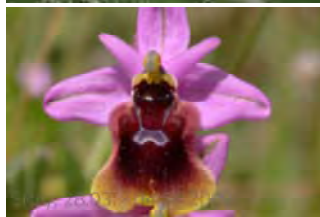
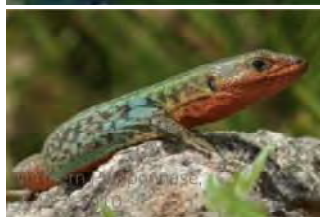


No – there is Algyroides on the tree



Myth #1: „Algyroides nigropunctatus kephallithacius has petrol-coloured throats“

There may be specimen with dark cyan-coloured (=petrol) throats. At least on Lefkada and Kefalonia males have green or yellow throats during mating season, females have yellow throats.



Caliaeshna microstigma



Phelipanche schultzioides



Ophrys cerastes – obviously, a Vipera genus has been named after this flower



Lefkada has nice beaches – obviously, we weren't the first to notice that



Myth #2: „*Algyroides nigropunctatus kephallithacius* can only be seen far from human settlements“
Our picture shows a habitat with high population density. These lizards are somehow synanthropic.



Algyroides nigropunctatus...



...and another one...



...and yet another one



Pair of *Algyroides nigropunctatus*

26.5.

The herpetofauna of Lefkada seems to be rather poor. Besides the species mentioned above we merely noticed some *Pseudopus apodus* DOR and something that looked like a ran-over *Hierophis gemonensis*. Therefore, we took the early ferry to Kefalonia where about 25 herptile species have been encountered. After one hour on the "Captain Aristidis" we arrived at the port of Fiskardo – at perfect beach weather! In the afternoon, we headed for the Enos Mountain, a peak of 1600 meters altitude with a population of *Algyroides nigropunctatus*. Much to the delight of all motor-alpinists an asphalt road goes straight to the peak. Hence we were able to enjoy the scenic view without an exhausting hike. Actually, we found *Algyroides nigropunctatus* in the peak area. But these peculiar mountain dwellers weren't cooperative at all when we tried to take pictures. In the end, we had wasted a complete afternoon finding out that *Algyroides* on Mount Enos is shy and on top of that, they don't look very good. Photographing didn't get better in the evening sun, so we left this place...grumbling.



Approaching Fiskardo



View from Enos peak, with Zakynthos in the background



Viola cephalonica



Myth #3: "*Algyroides nigropunctatus* kephallithacius prefers high-altitude habitats"

Though *Algyroides nigropunctatus* occurs on Mount Enos it seems to be more abundant in lower areas.

27.5.

Highly motivated, with spirit of adventure we started herping in the early morning to explore some promising habitats. But everywhere, we came across the omnipresent *Algyroides nigropunctatus* – only *Algyroides nigropunctatus* (apart from some road casualties like *Malpolon insignitus*). Places which were supposed to provide *Algyroides moreoticus* turned out to be pure nigro-spots. In the late afternoon we became more and more nervous...

At sunset, finally, as the temperatures decreased, luck was on our side: *Podarcis tauricus*, *Anguis cephalonica*, *Tarentola mauritanica* and – to our delight – *Zamenis situla* were the results of that evening.

Myth #4: „*Algyroides nigropunctatus* kephallithacius is specialized with regard to its habitats“

We found these lizards literally everywhere – near brooks or ponds, in olive groves, in hotel gardens, at the roadside.



At this nice brook we found:



Algyroides nigropunctatus



In this olive grove we found:



Algyroides nigropunctatus



On this old oak tree we found:



Algyroides nigropunctatus



Myth #5: „Algyroides nigropunctatus kephallithacius avoids the afternoon sun and can be observed best in the early morning and the evening”

We cannot confirm this: We saw these lizards basking in full sun at noon.



Myth #6: „Algyroides nigropunctatus kephallithacius is rare”

Well, rather not...



Onychogomphus forcipatus



Polygonia aegea



Aristolochia rotunda



Finally, something different: *Podarcis tauricus* coming out in the evening light



Anguis cephalonica – on Kefalonia the species name makes sense!



Zamenis situla



Tarentola mauritanica at our studio at night

28.5.

The day started promising with *Podarcis tauricus* at our studio. We went to Argostoli to watch out for sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*). Due to the crowd of onlookers the right spot in Argostoli harbour was easily found. In view of these impressive turtles even normal tourist became enthusiastic herpetologists, pulling out their smartphones and iPads keenly. The afternoon didn't bring spectacular findings: the omnipresent *Algyroides nigropunctatus* and some *Lacerta trilineata* DOR.



Podarcis tauricus



The turtle zoo of Argostoli – and it goes like this: in the morning, the fishermen return to the harbour where they sell their catch.



A continuous cold chain is crucial for professional fish processing – this challenge has been mastered perfectly by a parasol, as you can see on the picture.



Unsalable stuff is thrown back into the sea which attracts the marine turtles.



Et voilà: turtle zoo!



Caretta caretta...



...another one...



...and another one.



Even the fishes were enthusiastic!

29.5.

We gave another try for *Algyroides moreoticus*: This species is much more colourful on Kefalonia than on the Peloponnes and we didn't want to miss it. In central Kefalonia we finally succeeded. We came across that species in a habitat with *Cyrtopodion kotschy*, *Podarcis tauricus*, *Anguis cephalonica*, *Lacerta trilineata* – but without *Algyroides nigropunctatus*. Hence, if you ever will visit Kefalonia, search for spots where *Algyroides nigropunctatus* doesn't occur... In the afternoon we visited a mountain habitat where we found *Telescopus fallax* and *Vipera ammodytes*.



Podarcis tauricus



Juvenile *Anguis cephalonica*



Happy *Cyrtopodion kotschy*



Finally! *Algyroides moreoticus*



Myth #7: „On Kefalonia, Algyroides nigropunctatus is rarer than Algyroides nigropunctatus“

It's the other way round: We had problems finding Algyroides moreoticus at all. That species is less abundant and more secretive than Algyroides nigropunctatus.



Cyrtus ruber



Podarcis tauricus



Mountain meadow on Kefalonia – home of...



...Telescopus fallax and...



Vipera ammodytes

30.5.

From the 25 herptile species on Kefalonia we had seen – hmm – six or seven, so far? Anyhow, we left Kefalonia and took the early ferry to the mainland where we arrived at noon: Etoloakarnania. This prefecture comprises, as its name indicates, two areas: Akarnania in the West consists of limestone mountains and resembles to the adjoining Ionian Islands. Aetolia in the east is characterized by the slopes of southern Pindos. As there was a lot of rain in the Pindos Mountains during our stay, we actually visited Akarnania only. A fascinating area, sparsely populated, not touristic at all. Even the beautiful coast seems to live in the shadows of the Ionian Islands. Here are our chronicles of Akarnania...

The first reptile we came across on the mainland was – surprise – *Algyroides nigropunctatus kephallitacius*. The crop of an excursion in the afternoon was *Testudo marginata*, *Lacerta trilineata* and *Bufo viridis*.



Leaving Kefalonia, with Ithaka on the left



The Akarnanian Coast at Mitikas – a beautiful patch



Myth #8: „Algyroides nigropunctatus kephallithacius occurs on Kefalonia and Lefkada only“
No, the mainland south of Amvrakian Gulf is also populated by the green-throated subspecies.



Professional tortoise photography (Testudo marginata):



Wrong...



Right!



Village pond with...



Lacerta trilineata...



...and this calling Bufo viridis, which attracted our attention by its beautiful voice



Orthetrum brunneum



Gonepteryx cleopatra

31.5.

We went to Lake Amvrakia, one of four big lakes in Etoloakarnania. The lake is lovely – too bad that it is completely inaccessible. The plain parts of its shores are fenced pastures and the rocky parts of the shores aren't accessible at all. Obviously, no one expects that tourists could be interested in the lake. So we had to abstain from a refreshing bath. At one spot, we were able to get close to the water and this gave us an idea of the treasures of that lake: *Natrix natrix*, *Hierophis gemonensis*, *Lacerta trilineata* and *Algyroides nigropunctatus* were seen here. In the afternoon, we came to a place, where *Algyroides nigropunctatus* showed intermediate colouration of *kephallitacius* and *nominata* form.



Lake Amvrakia

*Natrix natrix*



Hierophis gemonensis



Lacerta trilineata



Algyroides nigropunctatus – transition form?



Algyroides nigropunctatus

1.6.

Another trip across the wild Akarnania! Although there were plenty of suitable habitats, we saw remarkably few reptiles. It is noteworthy that the genus of Podarcis is apparently absent in Akarnania, although Podarcis tauricus, Podarcis muralis and Podarcis erhardii have been reported from adjoining Aetolia. In this regard, Akarnania resembles to Lefkada: The lack of Podarcis (tauricus) on that island has been described in literature. Probably Lefkada and Akarnania had been isolated sometimes from the mainland and therefore have not been populated by Podarcis.

Cruising through Akarnanien we came across Testudo hermanni sometimes. Furthermore, there are a lot of artificial ponds in that area, probably for watering the fields. Here we found Emys orbicularis.

At the marvellous Lake Ozeros we made the same experience than at Lake Amvrakia the day before: Perfect scenery but no possibility to get to the lake. However, going there was worth it, because we had the opportunity to do a good deed: A Bufo bufo had fallen in an irrigation canal and was about drowning in the vortex of a drain. Heroically, we saved the completely exhausted animal.



Anywhere in Akarnania...



Testudo hermanni was the most abundant – or more precisely: the only – reptile species we saw in this landscape.



Artificial pond with:



Emys orbicularis



and another one



Lake Ozeros



Bufo bufo in distress



Saved!



Nooo! *Elaphe quatorlineata* DOR

2.6.

A daytrip to an eastern part of the area provided *Algyroides nigropunctatus* which looked like the nominate form. In between, we also noticed some intermediate colour variations, with maybe some influence of subsp. *kephallithacius*. Back to the coast, we managed to get some *trilineata* shots and finally managed to catch a *Pseudopus apodus*. After 10 great days we looked back in melancholy and – after some difficulties in finding species in the beginning – our twitching list comprised 20 species after all.



Algyroides nigropunctatus – nominate



Another one



Intermediate colours – rainbow lizard!



Lacerta trilineata



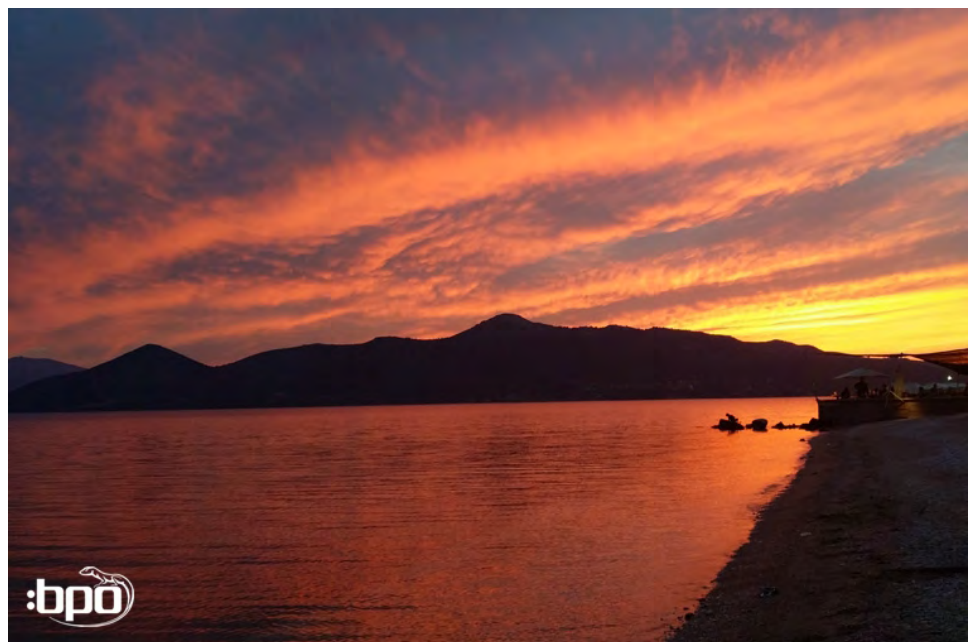
And another one



After dozens of specimen dead on the road we really appreciated to find a Pseudopus apodus alive.



Myth #9: „Greece, land of the myths!“
Yamas!



Time to get sentimental – dinner with sunset inclusive

3.6.

A short farewell tour in the morning brought *Algyroides nigropunctatus* once again. At noon it started raining – time for us to enter the airplane bringing us back home.



A last farewell: *Algyroides nigropunctatus* kephallithacius – If anyone still thinks he hasn't learned enough about these

lizards, we recommend to re-read this report from the beginning.

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