

New localities of Eastern Montpellier Snake – *Malpolon insignitus* (Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, 1827) from Southwestern Bulgaria

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Abstract. The current report presents three new localities of the Eastern Montpellier Snake in Bulgaria. Two of them are situated along the valley of Mesta River whereas the third one is on the slopes of Belasitsa Mountain. The localities along Mesta River are of great interest, because they represent the valley as natural corridor for penetration and distribution of mediteranean species in Bulgaria. Two of the localities arouse interest because of their high altitude.

Key words: Eastern Montpellier Snake, new localities, Belasitsa Mountain, Mesta River.

The Eastern Montpellier Snake – *Malpolon insignitus* (Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, 1827) is a rare reptile species in Bulgaria with local distribution in the southern part of the country. It is included in Annex III of Biological Diversity Act, as well as in Annex III of Bern Convention (Biserkov *et. al.* 2007). The first record of the species in Bulgaria is from Strandzha Mountain (Buresh 1929 as *Coelopeltis monspessulanus*); later on new locations in Eastern Rodopes and Southern Black Sea Coast were discovered (Buresh 1929 as *Coelopeltis monspessulanus*). In 1960 the Eastern Montpellier Snake was recorded along the Struma Valley in the southern parts of Kresna Gorge (Beškov 1961 as *M. monspessulanus*). The contemporary distribution of the species ranges over Bulgaria is in the southern parts of Struma Valley north to Simitli Town, some places in Eastern Rodopes, southern parts of the Maritsa Valley, Derventski Hills, Strandzha Mountain and Southern Black Sea Coast north to Burgas Town (Beškov *et. al.* 1967, Beškov 1974, Beshkov 1984, Beshkov & Naney 2002 as *M. monspessulanus*, Biserkov *et. al.* 2007, Stojanov *et al.* 2011 as *M. insignitus*).

The current report presents three new localities of the Eastern Montpellier Snake from Southwestern Bulgaria. Two of them are situated along the valley of Mesta River, whereas the third one is on the slopes of Belasitsa Mountain.

The localities along Mesta Valley are as follows:

1) Right shore of Mesta River, northeastern direction from the village of Beslen, N41°28'25.76", E23°58'45.29", an altitude of 443 m, with one individual 26,5 cm in total, caught by Lyuben Domozetski on 07.09.2012 (Fig. 1);

2) Beslen Village, N41°28'19.80", E23°57'53.55", an altitude of 704 m, with one individual 23 cm in total, caught by Lyuben Domozetski on 08.09.2012 (Fig. 2); Beslen Village, N 41°28'20.21", E 23°58'11.37", an altitude of 642 m, a skin shed of one individual 75 cm long, collected by Lyuben Domozetski on 08.09.2012.

These two localities belong to the square GL49 of the cartographic system UTM 10x10.

The first one is situated on the shore of the river in sandy area with lots of rocks and sparse bushwoods of *Carpinus betulus*, *Quesrcus* spp., *Populus alba*, *Platanus orientalis*,

Salix alba (Fig. 3 and 4). The following reptile species were registered in radius of 500 m of the locality of the Eastern Montpellier Snake: Hermann's Tortoise – *Testudo hermanni* (Gmelin, 1789), European Pond Turtle – *Emys orbicularis* (Linnaeus, 1758), Erhard's Wall



Fig. 1. *Malpolon insignitus*, Mesta Valley, Beslen, 08.09.2012.



Fig. 2. *Malpolon insignitus*, Mesta Valley, Beslen, 08.09.2012.

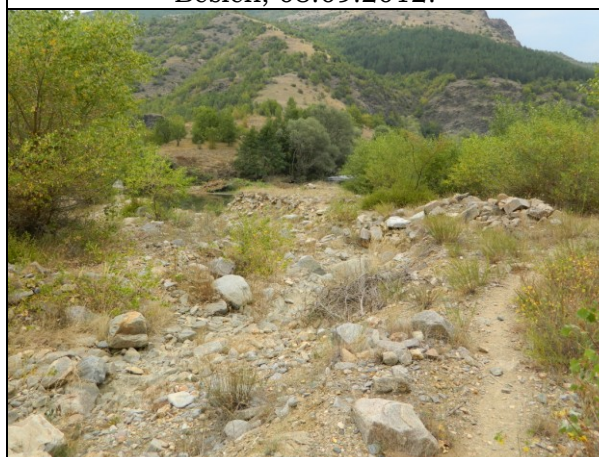


Fig. 3. Mesta Valley, habitat of *Malpolon insignitus*, 08.09.2012.



Fig. 4. Mesta Valley, habitat of *Malpolon insignitus*, 08.09.2012.



Fig. 5. *Malpolon insignitus*, Belasitsa Mt., 18.07.2012.

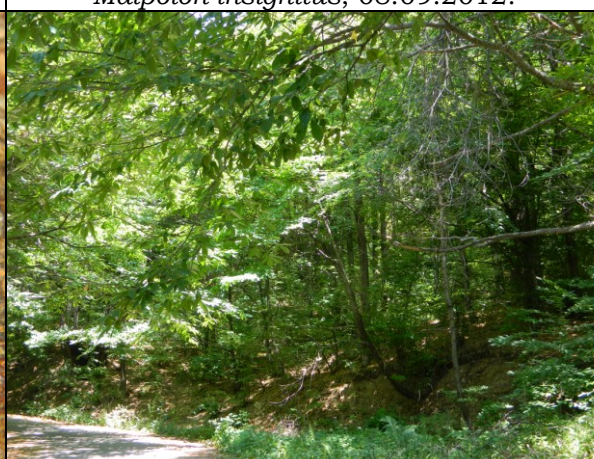


Fig. 6. Belasitsa Mt., habitat of *Malpolon insignitus*, 18.07.2012.

Lizard – *Podarcis erhardii* (Bedriaga, 1882), European Green Lizard – *Lacerta viridis* Laurenti, 1768, Dice Snake – *Natrix tessellata* (Laurenti, 1768), Horned Viper – *Vipera ammodytes* (Linnaeus, 1758), as well as moulted skin of Caspian Whipsnake – *Dolichophis*

caspius (Gmelin, 1779). The second locality is situated on the territory of the village of Beslen in an anthropogenized habitat.

The localities along Mesta River are of great interest, because they represent the valley as natural corridor for penetration and distribution of mediteranean species in Bulgaria (Petrov *et al.* 2006). Moreover, the second locality is one of the highest altitudinal records for Bulgaria so far (Stojanov *et al.* 2011).

The third locality is also interesting in respect to the altitude. It is situated on the northern slopes of Belasitsa Mountain near Belasitsa Hut, N41°22'05.45", E23°11'31.77", with an altitude of 692 m, with one individual with 25 cm length, caught by Lyuben Domozevski on 18.07.2012 (Fig. 5). This locality belongs to the square FL88 of the cartographic system UTM 10x10. It is situated in broadleaved mixed sweet chestnut and beech forest (Fig. 6). The following reptile and amphibian species were registered in radius of 500 m of the third locality: European Green Lizard – *Lacerta viridis* Laurenti, 1768, Common Wall Lizard – *Podarcis muralis* (Laurenti, 1768), Aesculapian Snake – *Zamenis longissimus* (Laurenti, 1768), Agile Frog – *Rana dalmatina* Bonaparte, 1840 and Fire Salamander – *Salamandra salamandra* (Linnaeus, 1758).

Several authors reported that the Eastern Montpellier Snake is found mostly in lower, warm and dry areas in sandy and rocky habitats, whereas in Eastern Bulgaria it is also found in forest meadows and openings in sparse broadleaved forests (Beshkov 1984, Beshkov & Nanev 2002, Biserkov *et al.* 2007). The new localities show that in the western part of the country the species is found in broadleaved forests, as well as in anthropogenized habitats.

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