

## Herpetological trip report Croatia 23.05. to 06.06.2015



From May 23rd to June 6th, 2015 I did my second trip to Croatia. This time it was more planned as a convalescent trip with my girlfriend Michelle. The focus should not primarily be on herping trips or findings. But my girlfriend had to do a lot for her studies at university and so I could do more herping trips than I first expected.

Already two days before we started, the weather was predicted to be not so good for the next days in whole Europe. And exactly so it was. Our arrival was on a cloudy Saturday with several showers.

The next day we visited the National Park "Plitvice lakes" also with cloudy weather and several showers. Unfortunately the park was nevertheless well visited like you should expect at this time of the year. Amazing for this time of the year were the high water levels and the many flooded trails. Despite the bad weather the waterfalls were wonderful! We could not find any reptiles sadly, as we already expected this from the weather. But we had an amazing animal sighting: a dormouse, who flew in a burrow in the root system of a tree. It observed us from the entrance of its burrow.



National Park Plitvice lakes, Veliki Slap (78m high), the highest waterfall of Croatia





Entrances to the burrow of the dormouse in the loamy soil under the root system of a tree



The dormouse observed us from it's burrow





National Park Plitvice lakes

In the hope of better weather we bought a ticket for two days in the National Park. After we had cloudy weather the first day, the weather got even worse with a lot of rain the second day. So we drove at noon to our main holiday accommodation at the Novigradsko more.

Early evening we reached our holiday apartment in the bay of Meka Draga of the small village Ribnica, which is a district of Obrovac. The holiday apartment was in the first line to the sea and rewarded us with a beautiful balcony, which offered us a view over the whole bay. From the plot boundary it only was 3-5 metres to the (pebble) beach.

The next morning I decided to do a trip in the mountainous hinterlands and visit the habitat of *Vipera ursinii macrops*, although the weather was cloudy and windy (bora). Somehow or other the weather was only good for habitat exploration and with few chances for concrete reptile searching. At this point I want to thank Berislav (Bero) Horvatic for the hint! In between the weather cleared up several times, but the bora blew continually. Beside a first impression of this habitat the trip rewarded me with a wonderful *Papilio machaon* (swallowtail butterfly) and when the weather cleared up more at the afternoon, also some *Lacerta viridis* showed up. Because of the cool and windy weather they were quite inactive and I could come closer than I expected. The weather was also the reason, why I searched by turning stones, what brought me a lot of findings of several myriapodae (centipede and millepede etc.), spiders and scorpions.

For sure I wanted to find a snake and so I followed another hint of Bero, who described me some ponds near the street. There I wanted to search for *Natrix natrix persa*. I just found one of this ponds and parked my car when I tripped up on the first *Natrix natrix persa*, a beautiful adult.



*Papilio machaon* (swallowtail butterfly), in magnificent fresh dress, Croatia





*Lacerta viridis*, in habitat of *V. ursinii macrops*, Croatia



*Lacerta viridis*, in habitat of *V. ursinii macrops*, Croatia





*Natrix natrix persa*, adult, playing dead reflex, Croatia



*Natrix natrix persa*, adult, Croatia



The next morning I just found near our holiday apartment a young *Malpolon insignitus* dead on the road, that must have been run over last night. A species I wished to find alive one time.

The clouds were gone and the sun was shining, but still there was a bit of the bora. So I decided to do a halfday trip to Novigrad, exploring the old castle complex and search for reptiles. A hint Alexander Pieh gave to me by phone the evening before. The trip brought two *Testudo hermanni hercegovinensis*, some *Lacerta trilineata*, some *Pseudopus apodus* and again by turning around some stones a lot of myriapods, spiders and scorpions.



Novigrad, at theNovigradsko more, with the old castle complex above, Croatia





MICHAEL WILMS  
Naturfotografie

Old castle complex of Novigrad, Croatia; habitat of lots of reptile species



MICHAEL WILMS  
Naturfotografie





*Testudo hermanni hercegovinensis*, female, Croatia



*Testudo hermanni hercegovinensis*, another female than above, in typical habitat, Croatia





2x *Lacerta trilineata*,  
in their habitat around the castle complex of Novigrad, Croatia







*Pseudopus apodus*, Croatia





The next day I had an appointment with Alexander Pieh at 10 o'clock at the Vrana lake (Vransko jezero). I got to know Alex by the fieldherping.eu-forum just before this trip. He came along with his family, his wife and his two daughters. Together we first explored the planks and found lots of *Rana ridibunda* after a short time. The first diving *Natrix tessellata* and also the first *Emys obicularis* were found by one of his daughters, that seemed to have a real reptile instinct. But unfortunately they were away from the planks on which we were and partly hidden by the reed.

We decided to drive to another place of the Vrana lake and attended to a habitat, that was a bit away of the lake. It consisted of typical natural stone walls, like they can be found there everywhere, and small boulder dumps. After maybe 15 min. I found a juvenile *Vipera ammodytes* in its second year. Some nice photos later we searched again for reptiles and came nearer to the lake again. At the lake Alex discovered a very beautiful yellow *Natrix tessellata*, which coloration let us stumble a second. Even from distance we wondered about this coloration and the first photos I did with a 300 mm telephoto lens. But had luck and the snake let us come nearer. The next day I uploaded some of the photos to the fieldherping.eu-forum and we experienced, that it was an exemplar of *Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens*, that was described by WERNER 1891. Without knowing it in the moment I shot the photos, I realized afterwards that I did some good pictures of the exemplar, because you could recognize the reddish or orange eyes and the reddish tongue, that WERNER described. Also the first diving *Natrix tessellata* appeared afterwards as a var. *flavescens* when I checked the photos back in Germany.

At late noon Alex had to go to a beach with his family and I looked for a hill between the Vrana lake and the sea, which I troublesome climbed on cross country, to try a 360° Panorama photo.

There I found some more nice swallowtail and sail swallowtail butterflies, *Papilio machaon* and *Iphiclides podalirius*, but they unfortunately had all damaged and shred wings.





*Pelophylax ridibundus* (old: *Rana ridibunda*), Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia



*Emys obicularis*, Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia





*Vipera ammodytes*, juvenile, Croatia







*Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens*, Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia  
The characteristics described by WERNER 1891 like the reddish tongue and the orange shining eyes can be recognized.







*Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens*, Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia

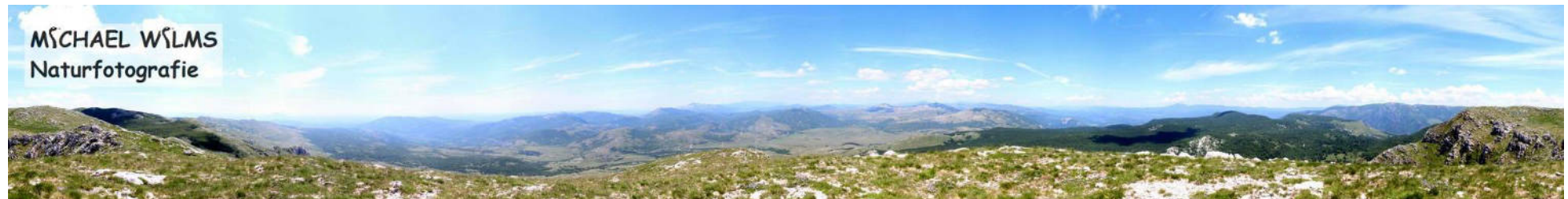


Alexander Pieh taking photos of a *Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens* at Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia





360° Panorama photo which shows on the left the sea and on the right the Vrana lake (Vransko jezero)



360° Panorama photo of the mountainous Croatian hinterland



The next day Alex and I spend the whole day in the *Vipera ursinii* macrops habitat, but without finding any snake unfortunately. Nevertheless it was interesting for us, to explore together this habitat in a hight over 1000 metres a.s.l. Also the *Lacerta viridis*, I found here last time, did not show up. At the afternoon we only found two *Lacerta agilis bosnica*.

The only hint for *Vipera ursinii macrops* showed up, when Alex found a fresh intact mold of a male. We searched through all habitat structures and through all times of the whole day, we really combed the whole area.

I visisted this habitat two more times (one time again over 11 hours in the habitat from 7 am till 6 pm) with searching throug all habitat structures and at all times of the day, but I had no luck and it brought not the wanted result. Not any snake in this habitat!

Even the searching of concrete places I knew brought nothing! There were no snakes outside, because if there had been one around I must had found it.

On the following pages I summarize the photos I took at all four visits in the *Vipera ursinii* macrops habitat There I saw lots of beautiful butterflies and found lots of myriapods and arachnids by turning stones.



Typical *Vipera ursinii* macrops habitat in Croatia, above 1000m a.s.l.





Alex Pieh taking photos of a gravid *Lacerta agilis* in *V. ursinii* macrops habitat, Croatia







*Lacerta agilis bosnica*, male, Croatia







Alex Pieh taking photos of a gravid *Lacerta agilis* in *V. ursinii macrops* habitat, Croatia



*Gentiana* sp.





Typical food of *Vipera ursinii macrops*, Croatia







*Iris sp.*, Croatia



Caterpillar of *Malacosoma sp.*, which I saw often in the mountains





*Melitaea diamina*



*Deilephila elpenor*

*Philaeus chrysops*







By turning stones I often found different colored *Euscorpius* sp.





I was on the way back home to the apartment when I saw the car before me running over an adult *Malpolon insignitus* after I dropped of Alex. It should not be the last one... When I only could find one alive!



*Malpolon insignitus*,  
adult, DOR, Croatia

The next day I only did a small half-day trip with my girlfriend to the castle complex above Novigrad, where I already had been, because my girlfriend wished to see once a *Testudo hermanni hercegovinensis* in the wild. I straight found the same two specimens which I already knew. Alex told me, he found around there other specimens which I did not find.

My girlfriend was happy and it should not be the last specimen we found together. During the whole trip two more passed the streets in front of our car, which we each "rescued" and brought to the other side of the road to which they were walking, far enough from the street in the terrain.



My girlfriend  
Michelle at one of our  
„We help the turtle  
above the street“-  
Campaigns



After a rest day with my girlfriend, which had a highlight with a good dinner in a wonderful Konoba in Novigrad, to which Alex Pieh and his family kindly invited us, followed a sad experience in the evening. When we drove home we discovered near our holiday apartment a cat at the roadside which played with something. Chased away by our car, we saw that it was a young *Zamenis situla*.

It was slashed on two locations on it's body and at one of it some intestines were a bit pushed out. Because the snake was still that agile we decided to try a medical wound care. We took the young snake and cleaned and disinfected the wounds, cut pushed out fat tissue and tried to bring the bit of intestines back in it's body. Then we disinfected again and bandaged the wounds. Beause the snake made a agile impact, we hoped it had a realistik chance to survive. But it unfortunately died this night. For sure the chances never were very good, but we had to try it! Wound and trauma management at humans is easier, I think!

Later this evening, when I had to go to the car again, I discovered a *Hemidactylus turcicus* on our exterior wall. The next days I found every evening at least one or two specimen of them when I searched for them on our exterior wall.



*Zamenis situla*, juvenile, critical injured by a cat, Croatia





*Hemidactylus turcicus*, at a natural stone wall, Croatia







*Hemidactylus turcicus*, at exterior wall, Croatia

The following day my girlfriend Michelle and me made a day trip to the island Pag. We did not start as early in the morning as we wanted unfortunately. When we reached the island it was nearly noon and so it was already really hot! So we only did a short stop on a hotspot Bero told me to get an overview of the habitat and then went on the main street of the island. A pond on the peninsula Lun, where I found some *Emys obicularis* two years ago was desiccated completely to my surprise. No *Emys obicularis* could be found.

We drove over the whole island from the bridge to the top of the peninsula Lun. There we did a short walk through the old olive trees, which are up to 1600 years old. Here many things changed since my last visit two years ago. A signposted trail with shields (sponsored by the European Union) guides through the olive trees now. Here we found some *Podarcis siculus* and a *Pseudopus apodus*. Meanwhile it got very hot, so we looked for a quiet beach near Gajac, laid down in the umbra and cooled down in the sea. So we spend the afternoon and in the evening we had good fish for dinner with sea view in Novalja.

After sunset we drove back to our holiday apartment at the Novigradsko more.

Although we found a lot of dead snakes on the streets (also a *Malpolon insignitus* and a *Hierophis gemonensis* that were still alive, but had no chance) on the way to Pag in the forenoon, there were no snakes on the streets our way back in the evening.

Back to our holiday apartment we again found *Hemidactylus turcicus* on the exterior walls and two *Bufo viridis* next to of our apartment house.





Desiccated pond on the peninsula Lun, where I found some *Emys obicularis* two years ago

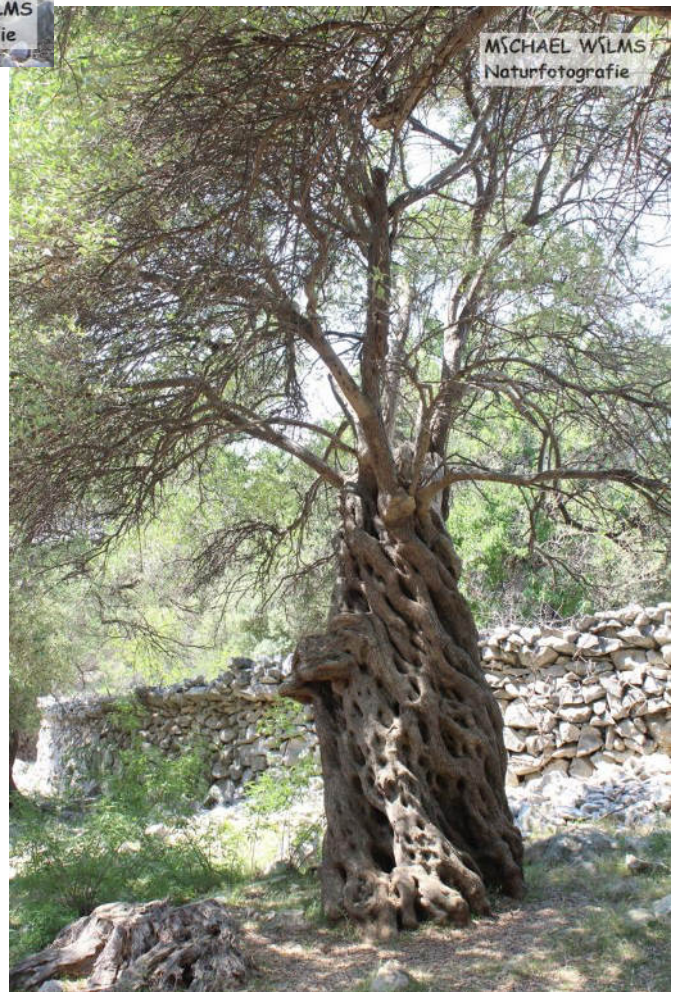


The relative new signposted trail through the old olive trees of the peninsula Lun





Over 1000 year old olive trees on the peninsula Lun:  
habitat of many reptiles







*Podarcis siculus* at an old olive tree, island Pag, peninsula Lun, Croatia



*Podarcis siculus*, island Pag, peninsula Lun, Croatia





*Bufo viridis*, Croatia







*Bufo viridis*, Croatia

After another whole day in the habitat of *Vipera ursinii* macrops on the next day without luck, we (my girlfriend and me) did a day trip with Alex, his wife and his two daughters to the national park Krka.

On the journey there we did two short stopovers, one time to save a *Testudo hermanni hercegovinensis* and another time to save a subadult *Pseudopus apodus* from the street. The *Pseudopus apodus* was just after its juvenile coloration and had real problems to move on the street. It wiggled like crazy but nearly didn't move on. Also the car before us had to do an evasive manoeuvre for it and we had to do also. But there wasn't another car behind us fortunately. So we could save it.

Arrived in Skradin we met Alex and his family and did the boat trip in the Krka national park (Skradinski buk) together. Here we did the classic tour around. There was a rush of people unfortunately. One of the most seen animals was the beautiful demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*). Among the herps it was *Rana ridibunda*, that we saw a lot. Everywhere they sat next to the planks, often good camouflaged. But there were little snakes sadly. Alex and me only found a young *Natrix natrix persa*.

Waysides a bit away of the rush, we found *Lacerta trilineata*, *Podarcis melisellensis* and *Podarcis sicula*, which did not seem to be photogenic and hid too fast.





*Pseudopus apodus*, subadult, just after the juvenile coloration, on the street but fortunately still healthy







*Pelophylax ridibundus* (old: *Rana ridibunda*), Krka national park, Croatia



*Natrix natrix persa*, juvenile, Krka national park, Croatia





*Natrix natrix persa*, juvenile, Krka national park, Croatia





The next was already my last chance for herping. So I visited ante meridiem again for the fourth time the *Vipera ursinii* macrops habitat, again without success with snakes, as I already wrote. Just some *Lacerta agilis bosnica* showed up.

Short time after noon I quit this and drove again to the Vrana lake (Vransko Jezero), because I wanted to search for more *Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens* (dice snake in the yellow coloration). When I arrived in the habitat it was already afternoon, but I had success! Straightaway I found two *Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens*, argued outside the water about a fish. While I watched them I saw one more var. *flavescens* swimming and diving in the water only a short distance away. Alternate I observed the three specimen. Parallel I found one more var. *flavescens* ca. 20 metres away, that I only saw from far away and that hide fast. So I could only see the yellowish-black coloration of the body, but not the coloration of the eyes or the tongue. The other three specimen were still on their positions, so I knew definitely that I found four different specimen of var. *flavescens*. In this time I also found two normal colored *Natrix tessellata*.

So two visits fo the Vrana lake (Vransko Jezero) brought a proportion of 6 *Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens* to 2 normal colored *Natrix tessellata*.



Two specimen *Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens* (dice snake in yellowish coloration),  
Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia





Two specimen *Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens* (dice snake in yellowish coloration) with a fish, Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia



*Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens* (dice snake in yellowish coloration) with a fish, Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia





*Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens* (dice snake in yellowish coloration) with a fish, Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia



*Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens* (dice snake in yellowish coloration), diving with good visible reddish tongue (appropriate to the "var. *flavescens*"-description of WERNER 1891), Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia





Two specimen Vransko jezero), Croatia  
*Natrix tessellata* var. *flavescens* (dice snake in yellowish coloration), diving with visible reddish or orange eyes (appropriate to the "var. *flavescens*"-description of WERNER 1891), Vrana lake (Vransko jezero), Croatia

The last day was a beach day like I promised to my girlfriend Michelle. I used it to try snorkeling for the first time and recognized how interesting also the underwater world of Croatia is and that I want to have a closer look on that one day, too.



## Thanks

First I want to thank my girlfriend Michelle for this wonderful trip and the patience she had for me and my hobby!

Furthermore I want to thank Berislav Horvatic for his many tips and hints relating to the *Vipera ursinii* but also many other species and "hotspots" (e.g. on Pag)!

Further thanks relating habitat tips and "hotspots" equally goes to Mario Schweiger and Rainer Hähnlein, who gave Alex Pieh informations, that we used and explored together.

Last but not least I also want to express my appreciation to Alex Pieh for the interesting excursions and trips we did together in Croatia. I enjoyed herping together and learned a lot from you, in our conversations as well as in experiences.

## Species List (Reptilia & Amphibia)

*Hierophis gemonensis* (6-7x DOR)

*Malpolon insignitus* (3x DOR)

*Natrix natrix persa*

*Natrix tessellata* (partly var. *flavescens*)

*Vipera ammodytes*

*Zamenis situla* (deadly injured by a cat)

*Emys obicularis*

*Testudo hermanni hercegovinensis*

*Hemidactylus turcicus*

*Lacerta agilis bosnica*

*Lacerta trilineata*

*Lacerta viridis*

*Podarcis melisellensis*

*Podarcis siculus*

*Pseudopus apodus*

*Bufo viridis*

*Pelophylax ridibundus* (old: *Rana ridibunda*)

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