

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

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Algyroides nigropunctatus (SQUAMATA: LACERTIDAE) IN THE CITY OF ATHENS: AN UNEXPECTED FINDING

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A small but growing population of the Dalmatian *Algyroides* (*Algyroides nigropunctatus*) was found in a suburb of Athens (Greece), a long way from the species' known range. This apparently introduced population increases the number of new lizard species documented in the Athens metropolitan area during the past few years.

Keywords: *Algyroides*; Lacertidae; lizards; introduction; Greece.

Algyroides is one of the smallest genera of the lizard family Lacertidae, comprising only four species that are found exclusively in Europe (Sillero et al., 2014). All *Algyroides* species prefer shaded and humid areas, which are scarce in the Mediterranean, a crucial fact largely responsible for their disjunctive distribution (Arnold, 1987; Arnold and Ovenden, 2002). The most widely distributed species within the genus is the Dalmatian *Algyroides* [*Algyroides nigropunctatus* (Duméril et Bibron, 1839)] that is distributed along the Adriatic coastline from north-eastern Italy to Greece, including numerous islands in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas (Valakos et al., 2008; Böhme et al., 2009; Sillero et al., 2014).

The Dalmatian *Algyroides* is a small-bodied (snout to vent length of up to 70 mm), diurnal, insectivorous lizard (Arnold and Ovenden, 2002). Like its congeneric species, it is best adapted to humid habitats (Bischoff, 1981), where it may form dense populations (Valakos et al., 2008; Carneiro et al., 2017). As such, the natural distribution of *A. nigropunctatus* in Greece is restricted to the

western part of the country (Ondrias, 1968; Valakos et al., 2008), including most of the Ionian Islands (Corfu, Paxi, Cephalonia, Ithaca, Zakynthos, Lefkada, and the nearby small islets) (Chondropoulos, 1986; Tóth et al., 2002; Valakos et al., 2008; Peek and van Soest, 2013). In these areas, precipitation is much higher, because of the Pindos Cordillera that accumulates clouds coming from the west and makes the climate rainier (Kotini-Zabaka, 1983). Here, for the first time, we report the presence of a population far to the east of the Pindos mountains, in the Athens metropolitan area.

In June and July 2018, the authors visited a small park in Filothei (a residential suburb located north of Athens; 38°01'20.1" N 23°46'51.3" E; 155 m a.s.l.) several times. During our visits, we observed many lizards (in total 12 adults of both sexes and 4 juveniles) basking or foraging on a stonewall on the periphery of the park, next to a water ditch collecting rain water. The vegetation in this location is quite dense, consisting mainly of large eucalyptus trees (*Eucalyptus globulus*), oriental planes (*Platanus orientalis*), pine trees (*Pinus halepensis*), and numerous small bushes, providing adequate shade and humidity. The lizards were very alert and hid in the crevices of the wall at the slightest disturbance. On July 2, we captured by noose a young adult female (SVL: 55 mm, tail length: 71 mm — regenerated, body weight: 3.6 g)

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Fig. 1. Adult female *Algyroides nigropunctatus* show casing keeled back scales (a, b), copulatory marks on the abdomen (c), and a regenerated tail (c).

and identified it as *A. nigropunctatus* based on the typical coloration (dark brown back, yellow underbelly and redish ventral side of the neck) and on scale structure and shape (dorsal scales partially overlapping and strongly keeled) (Fig. 1a, b). The female bore three visible marks on its abdomen (Fig. 1c), suggesting recent copulation. This fact, along with the presence of juveniles, leads us to infer that reproduction is taking place in this small population. The captured animal was deposited in the Herpetological Collection of the Zoological Museum of the University of Athens (ZMUA 4185).

This record enhances the increasing number of lizard species reported recently from Athens, species of either exotic (*Podarcis siculus*, Adamopoulou, 2015; *Podarcis vaucheri*, Spilani et al., 2018) or native origin (*Podarcis muralis*, Karameta and Pafilis, 2017; *Podarcis peloponnesiacus*, Hedman et al., 2017; *Tarentola mauritanica*, Strachinis and Pafilis, 2018). Surprising as it may be to find in a big city a species adapted to life in humid, shady habitats, the presence of *A. nigropunctatus* highlights the extent and recurrence of human-mediated lizard intro-

ductions, as well as the capacity of lizards to establish populations in urban ecosystems (Uğurtaş et al., 2000; Rivera et al., 2011). Our finding represents the easternmost population of *A. nigropunctatus*, as the documented eastern limit of its natural range is located in the prefecture of Fthiotida (Andriopoulos and Pafilis, 2016), more than 180 km west of Athens. Such reports are of particular interest, as they add to our knowledge on animal mobility, in the constantly changing biogeography of the Mediterranean basin (Spilani et al., 2018).

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