SPRING HERPETOFAUNA OF THE ROVINJ AREA (ISTRIA, YUGOSLAVIA)

By

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Now that Yugoslavia is rapidly becoming a European tourist centre, many herpetologists may be interested in the variety and abundance of forms which can be seen and collected there. This is a short account of the species seen during the last two weeks of March 1964 in an area so far little visited by British herpetologists. Rainfall was high during this period, in contrast apparently to the dry summer. It was understood from the local population that the visit was too early to see the larger lacertids and snakes.

AMPHIBIA

Bufo bufo spinosus (Common Toad)

This comparatively large toad was found in a pond surrounded by vegetation. The pond was deep in parts but water plants were common in the shallows and it was amongst these that the males were seen sitting and calling with a soft, deep croak. Catching these was fairly simple if they were stalked and then 'grabbed' or netted. No females were seen.

Bufo viridis viridis (Green Toad)

A single specimen was found in a hole in the surrounding soil of a Roman amphitheatre at Pula, south of Rovinj.

Hyla arborea arborea (European Green Tree-frog)

This species was found in hedges and small trees surrounding ponds in which *B. b. spinosus* was found. The males were calling in chorus approximately every fifteen minutes but at dusk the chorus was louder and more prolonged. The individuals in the immediate vicinity of intruders became silent and so catching in the trees was found to be impossible, not only for this reason but also as the chorus masked the sound of individuals. They were caught hopping towards the water mainly at dusk but sometimes during the daytime. Some were netted in the water or on rocks a few inches away. These latter individuals had changed colour from bright green to a dark, drab khaki. Few females had arrived at this stage but one was found which subsequently mated and produced spawn in a large polythene bag containing an inch of water.

Triturus vulgaris meridionalis (Common Newt)

This species was found in deep ponds (of at least eight feet) at the edges of agricultural land.

REPTILIA

Algyroides nigro-punctatus (Keeled Lizard)

This lizard was found on large boulders amongst low herbage and shrubs. Smaller individuals were found on the rocky areas of grassy banks alongside *Lacerta sicula campestris*

Lacerta muralis maculiventris (Wall Lizard)

A lizard which occurred very widely on stone walls found only in the town of Rovinj.

Lacerta sicula campestris (Ruin Lizard)

This small green lizard was common on grassy banks facing the sun and in other areas covered with low herbage.

Lacerta melissellensis fiumana

Some confusion arose with the identification of this lizard which was only tentatively identified in the field from Hellmich (1962). Colouration seemed to grade into that of *L. s. campestris* and it was thought that perhaps only one species had been collected. Dr. J. V. Tranter then kindly examined the whole live series and compared each form with the descriptions given by Mertens and Wermuth (1960) and by Boulenger (1885-1887). It was found that both species were represented but that *L. m. fiumana* occurred in at least three colour forms. These forms are described as:—

I. Uniform green, males with a red belly, females with a trace of a pale dorso-lateral streak. This is the type usually imported alive into England but they were not included in this collection.

II. Back green, with a dorsal row of spots and a whitish dorso-lateral line. Darkish sides. Males with a reddish belly (most caught were of this type).

III. Back green or brownish with dark brown vertebral and lateral bands spotted with black and with six whitish lines—on either side of the vertebral band, dorso-laterally and one laterally (collected and very similar to *L. s. campestris*).

Ophisaurus apodus (Glass "Snake" or Scheltopusik)

One live specimen was seen on the ground below brambles surrounding the ruins of a monastery. A specimen (110 cm. long) was found nearby which had apparently been killed by a blow on the head.

Each lacertid was found typically in one type of habitat. *L. muralis* was found only on buildings in Rovinj or outlying hamlets. *L. sicula* was found along roadside verges outside the town. Only for a small area was there a mixed *muralis-sicula* population. *L. melissellensis* was common only in land covered by low shrubs—clearings in woods, overgrown fields, etc. It is interesting to speculate on the relative abundance of these species with increasing building development, for it may be that *muralis* was an uncommon form found only around certain rocky places, but with stone buildings this species is now extremely common and apparently successful.

This area was found to be very rich in herpetofauna in terms of numbers of individuals at the time of the visit. According to the local population, it is apparently richer still with regard to numbers of species in later spring and early summer.

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