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Research Article

Filling in the gaps in distribution data of the Snake-eyed skink *Ablepharus kitaibelii* Bibron and Bory, 1833 (Squamata: Scincidae) in Serbia

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Abstract
The distribution of *Ablepharus kitaibelii* (Snake-eyed skink) in Serbia was reviewed, based on the collection of 183 records comprised of the authors' unpublished data, observations of colleague researchers and of literature data. Roughly 68% of these records have not been published previously. Apparent distribution gaps in western and southern parts of the country were largely filled in by new findings. The absence of the Snake-eyed skink in the northern parts of our country is most likely caused by large-scale alteration and destruction of suitable habitats. Presented data provide the basis for further research and conservation assessments of this species.

Key words: Scincidae, lizard, distribution pattern, peripheral populations, Balkan Peninsula.

Introduction

According to the latest taxonomic revision of the species (Schmidtler 1997), the Snake-eyed skink *Ablepharus kitaibelii* (Bibron & Bory 1833) occurs in the southern part of Slovakia, Hungary, south-eastern Europe and western and central Turkey, where it mainly inhabits grassy terrains on the edges and clearings of open oak and chestnut forests (Gruber 1981). The Snake-eyed skink reaches western limits of its distribution in Serbia (Pasuljević 1977; Ljubisavljević *et al*. 2002). However, the recent records by Szövényi and Jelić (2011) have extended the previously estimated north-western edge of the species range to eastern continental Croatia. The only two records for Bosnia and Herzegovina were reported by Aleksić (1954) and Sofradžija (1978) at the far east of the country, close to the border with Serbia.

Populations of *A. kitaibelii* from Serbia have been included in several ecological and morphological studies (Pasuljević 1965a; 1966; 1975; 1976; Ljubisavljević *et al.* 2002). It was shown that the Snake-eyed skink displayed significant intraspecific differentiation at the morphological level (Ljubisavljević *et al.*

2002), though genetic differentiation has yet to be determined. Also, there have been a number of contributions to the knowledge of the distribution of this species in Serbia (Pasuljević 1965b; 1968; 1977; Džukić 1972; 1974; Tomović *et al.* 2001 and references therein). However, distribution gaps still remained in some parts of the country, raising the question whether the scattered distribution pattern was a consequence of data deficiency or of specific ecological demands of the species (Tomović *et al.* 2001). This dilemma highlighted the need for the intensification of field research. Since the last chorological study by Tomović *et al.* (2001), numerous new occurrences of *A. kitaibelii* in Serbia have been registered through field work. Also, during a thorough review of the authors' personal data, some old records were found to be unpublished. Recently, Tomović *et al.* (2014) published approximative maps of actual and potential distributions of Serbian reptiles including the Snake-eyed skink, but without exact locality data or geographic positions.

In this paper we provide new and detailed distribution pattern of the Snake-eyed skink in Serbia. Such comprehensive distributional data could serve as a basis for further ecological and taxonomic studies, as well as conservation initiatives.

Material and Methods

We created a database of locations where *A. kitaibelii* was recorded within the territory of Serbia, which includes the following locality information: site name, UTM code, elevation (where available) and data source type (see Supplementary Information). The dataset consists of a number of previously published data (app. 32%) and unpublished records from: (1) our field observations, (2) unpublished records of late Prof. Dr. Gojko Pasuljević (University of Priština – Kosovska Mitrovica) and (3) field data kindly donated by our colleagues (see Acknowledgements). Some records are published in papers and conference reports written in Serbian and thus have limited access to the scientific community. We also used data from the internet sources (field herpetology website http://en.balcanica.info, and the portal dedicated to mapping and monitoring of biological diversity of Serbia http://www.bioras.petnica.rs/). These data were confirmed by experts, and their use was approved by authors.

The altitudinal division of the Serbian territory to Pannonian, Peripannonian and Mountain-Valley regions was given according to Marković (1970). Biogeographic division of Serbia was presented according to Vukov *et al.* (2013). All available records were mapped on the 10 x 10 km UTM (Universal Transverse Mercator) geographic coordinate grid system.

Results and Discussion

In total, 183 locations of occurrence of the Snake-eyed skink within the territory of Serbia were recorded. The majority of them (68%) were not previously published. Therefore, our study identified a more complete and larger distribution range of *A. kitaibelii* than previously recorded in Serbia (Pasuljević 1977; Tomović *et al.* 2001). This is especially true for Šumadija and for north-western and western parts of the country (Peripannonian region), which have not been previously recorded as the area of occurrence of this species (Fig. 1). The new findings near the south-western border of the country suggest the possibility that the range of the species could be extended even further, towards the suitable habitats in the northern Montenegro. Also, new findings in southern and south-eastern parts of Serbia contributed to the filling in significant gap in the species distribution between the populations from eastern Serbia and Kosovo.

As already noted (Pasuljević 1976; Ljubisavljević *et al.* 2002), in Serbia *A. kitaibelii* occurs along the north-to-south ascending elevation gradient, clearly following specific climatic, edaphic and biotic factors. In northern parts of the country, it prefers lower elevations, occurring in open habitats – remnants of steppes and forest steppes (Ljubisavljević *et al.* 2002). However, the presence of this species is primarily associated with thermophilic oak forests and shrubs. Towards the south it mainly prefers somewhat drier habitats (ecotones of steppe biomes) (Matvejev & Puncer 1989).

According to the data presented herein, the Snake-eyed skink has a wide distribution in Serbia, being found mainly in mountain-valley region. There the Snake-eyed skink occurs from valleys up to the mountain slopes at altitudes of 130–1100 m. The records in the Peripannonian region along the southern banks of the Sava and Danube rivers and in the Velika Morava River valley are much scarcer. In these areas the species

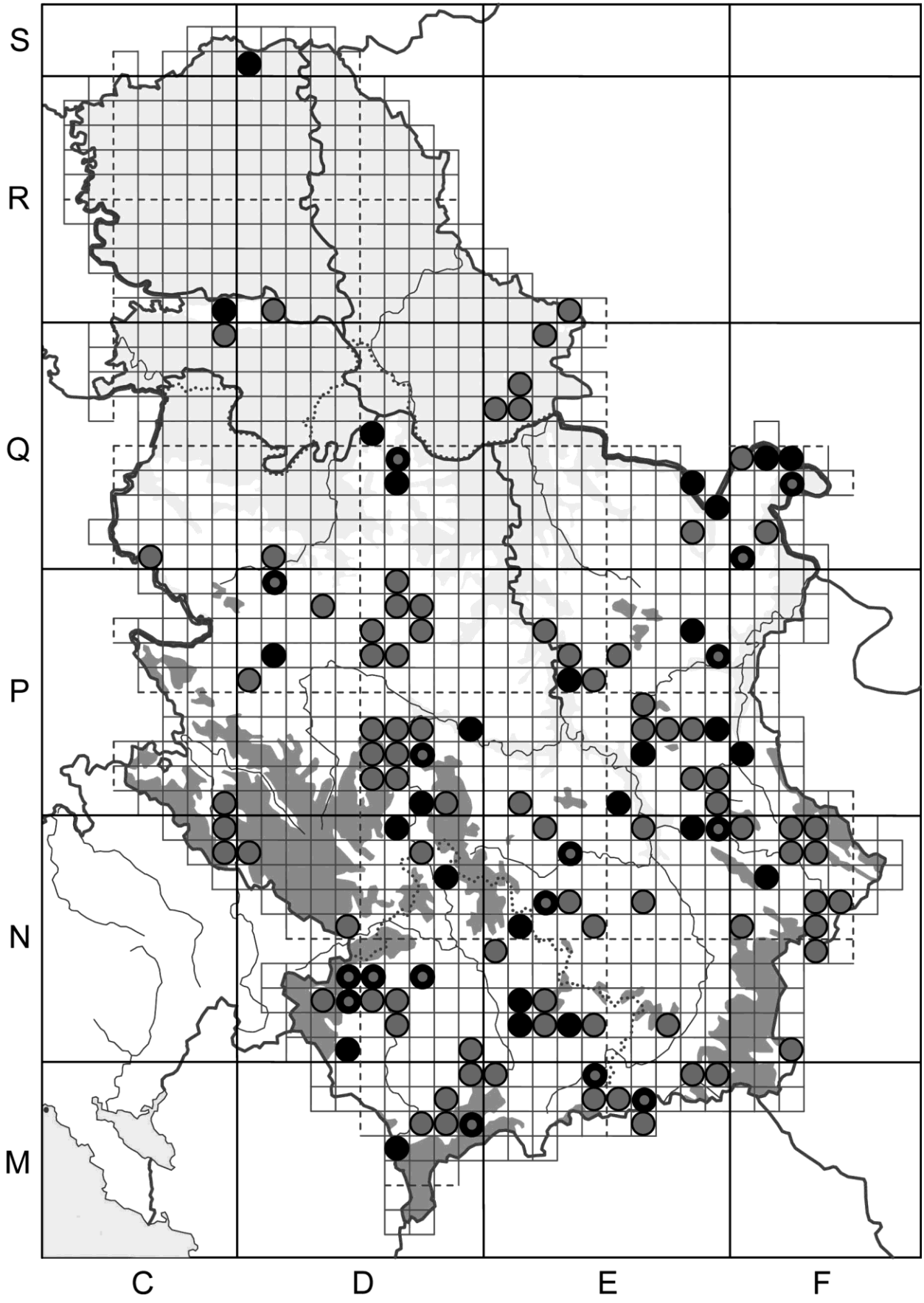

Figure 1. Records of *A. kitaibelii* from Serbia (National grid UTM 10 x 10 km Reference). Black squares – published records, grey squares – new records, grey + black squares – published and newly collected data.

expresses patchy distribution, mainly associated with oak forest-covered slopes with scattered clearings in lower elevations (up to 380 m). In the Pannonian plain in Vojvodina *A. kitaibelii* occurs only on few locations, mainly connected to scattered hills and remaining steppe fragments in Fruška Gora Mt., Subotičko-Horgoška and Deliblatska Peščara Sands. Although previously unpublished records identified the presence of the species in suitable habitats in Banat, there is still a large gap in northern Serbia (Bačka). However, it should be stressed that locations in Banat and Bačka were recorded more than 20 years ago (Prša 1954; authors' records) but there have been no recent confirmations. The same is true for old records gathered in some urban areas, such as Košutnjak in Belgrade (Karaman 1939; Aleksić 1954; auhors' records) and Vrnjačka Banja (Pasuljević 1965b). Further surveys should be systematic, conducted during the period of peak activity of the Snake-eyed skink to establish whether it still exists at these sites.

Obviously, destruction of suitable meadow steppe and forest steppe habitats for agricultural and industrial purposes and rapid urbanization contributed to fairly scattered distribution of the Snake-eyed skink in the Pannonian and Peripannonian regions of our country. The negative effects of these factors on Snake-eyed skink survival in the Pannonian Plain in Hungary have already been confirmed by Herczeg *et al.* (2004). These authors showed that only populations in areas under strict protection appeared to be stable.

Our study revealed that although new records largely filled in the distributional gaps in the Peripannonian and mountain-valley regions of Serbia, the wide distribution gap in northern Serbia appears to be genuine, probably caused by anthropogenic alterations of suitable habitats.

Acknowledgements

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Supplementary Information I

Information on localities, as follows: locality name (v. - village), UTM code, elevation (if available), source (field data - f.d. or literature data). For records obtained from BIORAS portal (Simović et al., 2012) only UTM codes were available.

1. Subotica: Palićko Lake DS00, Prša 1954; 2. Deliblatska Peščara Sand: v. Zagajica: Zagajička brda hills, EQ17, f.d.; 3. Deliblatska Peščara Sand: v. Mramorak: lugarnica Dolina Valley, EQ06, 132 m, f.d.; 4. Deliblatska Peščara Sand: v. Šumarak: Ružino polje Field, EQ16, 84 m, f.d.; 5. Vršac: v. Markovac: Puževo Hill, ER30, f.d.; 6. Vršac: Vršački vinogradi vineyards, EQ29, f.d.; 7. Blace: v. Mala Draguša, EN29, f.d.; 8. Goč Mt.: v. Kamenica, DP72, Džukić 1972; 9. Goč Mt.: Sokoljska River, DP72, Džukić 1972; 10. Goč Mt.: v. Brezna, DP72, f.d.; 11. Ibarska valley: Maglič grad fortress, DP62, 418 m, f.d.; 12. Mali Jastrebac Mt., EP50, Radovanović, 1957; 13. Kopaonik Mt.: Jošanička Banja: Gobeljska reka River, DP80, f.d.; 14. Kopaonik Mt.: Jošanička Banja, DP70, Crnobrnja and Rohalj, 1988; 15. Kopaonik Mt.: v. Rudnica, DN78, f.d.; 16. Kraljevo: Studenica River: Studenica Monastery, DP61, f.d.; 17. Kraljevo: v. Bogutovac: Lopatnica River Gorge, DP52, f.d.; 18. Kraljevo: v. Meljanica, DP72, 431 m, f.d.; 19. Kruševac: Klik Hill: Duboki vrh peak, EP10, f.d.; 20. Kršumlija: road Rudare-Prolom Banja, EN26, 450 m, Tomović et al. 2001; 21. Kuršumlija: v. Kosanička Rača, EN26, f.d.; 22. Prokuplje: v. Viča: Ložđe Hill, EN38, 420 m, Tomović et al. 2001; 23. Raška: v. Gornje Vlasovo, DN69, Pasuljević 1965b; 24. Sokolovica Mt.: Prolom Banja, EN36, 647m, f.d.; 25. Sokolovica Mt.: v. Rudare, EN26, f.d.; 26. Leskovac: v. Belanovce: Zajčevo, EN66, f.d.; 27. Niš: v. Novo Selo, EN69, f.d.; 28. Stolovi Mt.: Čukar, DP62, 600m, f.d.; 29. Stolovi Mt.: Dobre Strane, DP62, f.d.; 30. Stolovi Mt.: Klečak, DP62, f.d.; 31. Stolovi Mt.: Kozarevo Brdo Hill, DP63, f.d.; 32. Stolovi Mt.: Orlovac, DP72, f.d.; 33. Stolovi Mt.: Debelo Brdo Hill, DP73, f.d.; Stolovi Mt.: Mravinjak, DP73, f.d.; 34. Studenica River valley: v. Miliće, DP51, f.d.; 35. Troglav Mt.: Kulaj, DP53, f.d.; 36. Vrnjačka Banja, DP93, Pasuljević 1965b; 37. Gramada. v. Slivnica, FN46, 570m, f.d.; 38. Knjaževac, FP02, Đorđević 1900; 39. Knjaževac: v. Zorunovac, Kraljevica Hill, EP93, Aleksić 1954; 40. Ozren Mt.: Gradašnica River: Ripaljka waterfall EP63, 476 m, f.d.; 41. Pirot: v. Vlasi, FN36, 468 m, f.d.; 42. Pirot: v. Vlasi, FN35, 428-460 m, f.d.; 43. Sićevačka klisura Gorge: Sv. Bogorodica Monastery, EN89, Horvat et al. 1995; 44. Sićevačka klisura Gorge : v. Oblik, EN99, 700 m, f.d.; 45. Sićevačka klisura Gorge: v. Pleš, EN99, Horvat et al. 1995; 46. Sokobanja: v. Jošanica: Banja Jošanica, EP64, 495 m, f.d.; 47. Sokobanja, EP73, Aleksić 1954; 48. Sokobanja: Barudžija, EP63, EP73, Pasuljević 1977; 49. Sokobanja: Grad: hotel Moravica, EP73, 318 m, f.d.; 50. Sokobanja: Popovica: Vidikovac, EP73, 393 m, f.d.; 51. Sokobanja: Moravica River Gorge: Devica Mt. slopes, EP73, 345 m, f.d.; 52. Sokobanja: v. Vrelo: Moravica River - spring, EP83, 441 m, f.d.; 53. Stara planina Mt: v. Gostuša, FN39, f.d.; 54. Stara planina Mt.: v. Koprivštica, FN38, f.d.; 55. Stara planina Mt.: v. Oreovica, FN28, f.d.; 56. Stara planina Mt.: v. Ragodeš, FN29, f.d.; 57. Stara planina Mt.: v. Rudinje, FN29, f.d.; 58. Stara planina Mt.: v. Temska, FN29, f.d.; 59. Svrljig: v. Šljivovik: Šljivovik-Drajinac, Zabel, EP91, 607 m, f.d.; 60. Svrljiške Mts.: Rinjska Mt.: Gornji Rinj, FN09, f.d.; 61. Svrljiške Mts.: v. Izvor, EP90, f.d.; 62. FN17, Simović et al. 2012; 63. EP62, Simović et al. 2012; 64. Bosilegrad: v. Resen: Sušica River Gorge, FN20, 792 m, f.d.; 65. Crna Trava: v. Gornji Orah, FN05, 328 m, f.d.; 66. Dimitrovgrad: v. Petačinci, FN34, 620 m, f.d.; 67. Rudina Mt.: v. Izvor, FN20, 1107 m, f.d.; 68. Trgovište: v. Donja Trnica: Crnovska River Gorge, EM89, 600 m, f.d.; 69. Mokra Gora: klisura reke Ibar: Mehov krš, DN45, 835 m, f.d.; 70. Ozren Mt.: Dubočica River Gorge, DN08, f.d.; 71. Ozren Mt.: v. Sopotnica: Crvene stene, CN99, f.d.; 72. Ozren Mt.: Tičje polje Field, DN08, f.d.; 73. Prijepolje: Mileševka River Canyon: Mileševa Monastery, CP90, f.d.; 74. Prijepolje: v. Gostun: Dubočica River Gorge, CN98, f.d.; 75. Prijepolje: v. Kaćevo, CN99, f.d.; 76. Bojnik: v. Šilovo, EN66, f.d.; 77. Bujanovac: v. Biljača, EM68, Džukić 1980; 78. Karadag: v. Ilince, EM48, 814 m, f.d.; 79. Karadag: v. Mađare, EM49, 798 m, f.d.; 80. Preševo: v. Miratovac: Suva reka, EM58, 607 m, f.d.; 81. Radan Mt.: v. Donji Gajtan, EN45, 663 m, f.d.; 82. Rujan Mt.: v. Slavujevac: The road to Mali Orljak, EM67, f.d.; 83. Trgovište: v. Zladovce: The road to Mali Orljak, EM99, 776 m, f.d.; 84. Vranje: Pržar Hill: settlement Pržar, EN71, 679 m, f.d.; 85. Gnjilane: v. Lipovica, EM49, 650 m, Pasuljević 1968; 86. Kosovska Kamenica: v. Berivojce, EN41, f.d.; 87. Leposavić, DN87, Pasuljević 1977; 88. Priština: v. Novo Brdo, EN31, Pasuljević 1968; 89. Podujevo: v. Velika Reka, EN15, Pasuljević 1965b; 90. Priština: Gazimestan, EN12, Pasuljević 1965b; 91. Priština: Grmija Mt.: Butovac Hill, EN12, EN22, f.d. 92. Priština: Grmija Mt., EN12, Pasuljević 1965b; 93. Priština: v. Gračanica: Gračaničko Lake, EN21, f.d.; 94. Priština: v. Kišnica, EN11, Pasuljević 1965b; 95. Priština: v. Kojlovica, EN12, Pasuljević 1977; 96. Priština: v. Mramor, EN22, f.d.; 97. Priština: v. Sofalija, EN12, Münch 1997; 98. Priština, EN12, Radovanović 1964; 99. Priština: surroundings, EN12, Münch 1997; 100. Srbica: v. Čubrelj, DN73, f.d.; 101. Srbica: v. Rudnik, DN73, Fejervary 1922; 102. Šar planina: Brezovica: v. Jažince, DM97, f.d.; 103. Štimlje: v. Crnoljevo, DN90, f.d.; 104. Štimlje, EM09, f.d.; 105. Vučitrn: v. Samodreža, EN04, f.d.; 106. Crnoljeva planina Mt.: v. Dulje, DM99, f.d.; 107. Dečane, DN40, Fejervary 1922; 108. Istok: v. Banjica, DN52, f.d.; 109. Istok: v. Osojane, DN62, f.d.; 110. Istok: v. Prekale, DN53, f.d.; 111. Istok, DN53, Pasuljević 1977; 112. Klina: v. Volujak, DN61, f.d.; 113. Orahovac: v. Ljubižda, DM87, f.d.; 114. Peć: city: Karagač Park, DN42, f.d.; 115. Peć: Beli Drim River - spring, DN43, Pasuljević 1977; 116. Peć: Beli Drim River - spring: Radavačka Cave, DN43, f.d.; 117. Peć: v. Crni Vrh, DN42, Pasuljević 1965b; 118. Peć: Novo Selo, DN43, Fejervary 1922; 119. Peć: v. Vitomirica, DN42, f.d.; 120. Prizren: v. Ljutoglav, DM88, f.d.; 121. Prizren: v. Vlašnja,

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Supplementary Information II

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