

P14 - Updated distribution and diversity of lacertid lizards (Squamata, Lacertilia) in Montenegro

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The southern part of Montenegro has been pointed out as an area with outstandingly rich composition of herpetofauna. However, the systematic studies of distribution and diversity patterns of reptiles at the national level were lacking. Such studies are paramount in identifying areas of high conservation priority and planning conservation actions. The increased habitat loss and degradation due to rapid urbanization and tourism-related infrastructure development make studying and protecting biodiversity in Montenegro an urgent matter. So, in order to systematize the current knowledge base, we gathered a large dataset consisting of literature data and our previously unpublished records to assess distribution and diversity patterns of lacertid lizards in Montenegro. All data were mapped on 10 x 10 km national UTM grid. We found that eleven lacertid lizard species inhabit Montenegro (one treated as a species complex) and one additional species may be present. Six of eleven species are Balkan endemics, six reach margins of their distribution in Montenegro and three species have fragmented ranges. Lacertids were the most diverse in the Maritime biogeographic region of Montenegro, while areas of low diversity were along the state borders in the Mountain-valley region. The observed distribution is at least partly influenced by sampling bias, with areas in central parts and along the north-eastern border being largely data deficient. The eastern mountainous subregion had a distinct species composition compared to all other parts of the country. The East-Mediterranean chorotype was the most dominant represented by six species. The great diversity of lacertid fauna of Montenegro can be attributed to its specific topographic position with high influence of Mediterranean climate, heterogeneity of biomes, complex geological history and diverse relief. The Maritime region with its high species richness and eastern subregion of Montenegro with the most unique species composition are areas of high conservation priority.