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Central Spain, 29.8. - 14.9.2014

We desperately needed a justification for another Spain trip – current taxonomic developments offered the perfect pretext for this! First, in 2014, a new subspecies of Rock Lizard - *Iberolacerta monticola astur* – has been described. Secondly, also in 2014, two so far unnamed types of Iberian Wall Lizards received names: *Podarcis guadarramae* und *Podarcis virescens*. Plenty of good reasons for this trip! Thanks to Wouter Beukema, Frank Deschandol, Pedro Galan and Gabri Martinez. (And of course to Sancho Panza)



Southeastern Spain, 10.2016 - 11.2017



Jonian Islands, 25.5.-5.6.2017

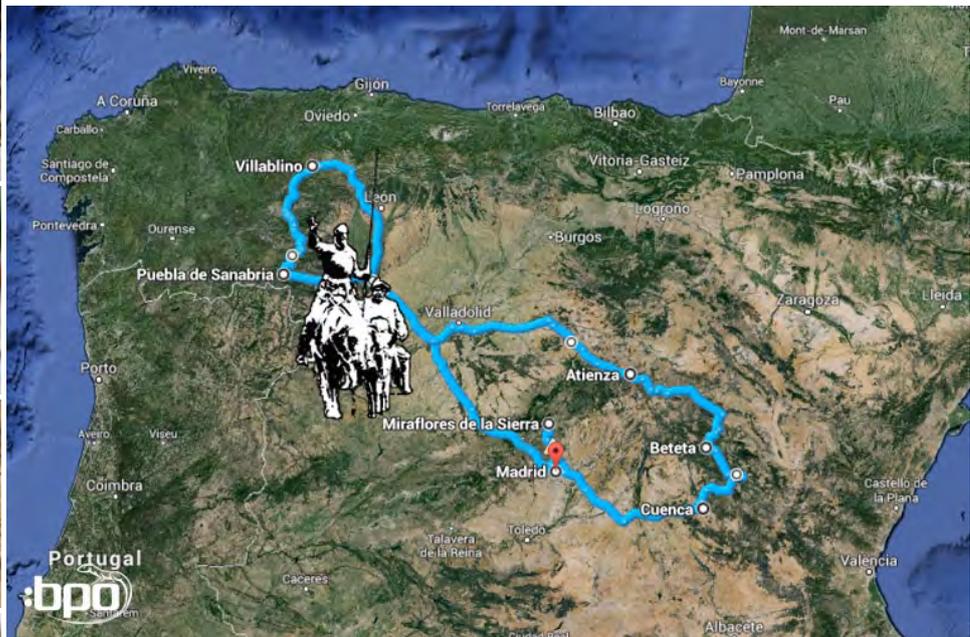


14.2017



Evening flight into a new adventure: sunset over the mouth of the Gironde River

Cervantes' Novel "Don Quijote" intended to warn the readers about the dangers of reading to many chivalric romances because this would cloud their minds. Maybe we had been reading too many trip reports and herpetology articles... Anyhow, for us the "new" Spanish lizard species seemed to be enormously interesting and important. Besides of the new *Iberolacerta* subspecies we were particularly interested in the contact zones of *Podarcis guadarramae*, *Podarcis virescens* und *Podarcis liolepis* in Central Spain: We wanted to find out if these *Podarcis* species can be clearly distinguished in that area. So we went on a new adventure: For warming-up, we re-visited the area of Puebla de Sanabria (Province Zamora) which already had turned out to be a hot-spot for lizards during our trip in 2011. Afterwards we started a journey into the unknown. Here are our Castilian adventures:



Our travel schedule: 2800 km in Central Spain

29.08.

We took the late evening flight from Düsseldorf to Madrid and spent the first night in a hotel near the airport (the hotel was located in an appealing business park and at the nearby 24-hours filling station we even had the chance to buy some cold drinks). At 11 pm it still was hot – a foretaste of the next two weeks – and at these temperatures we could observe several *Tarentola mauritanica* around the hotel.



Pyrenees, 2008 - 2016



Sicily & Aeolian Islands, 2016
6.6.2016



Spain, 2015 - 19.2015



11.7.2015



Spain, 2014 - 14.9.2014



Mallorca / Alaior



The first reptile (*Tarentola mauritanica*): Herping!!!

30.08.

We moved from Madrid towards Puebla de Sanabria. A stop-over in a supposed habitat of *Psammodromus occidentalis* only provided *Psammodromus algirus*. Due to the Castilian heat and dryness we soon cancelled our search and headed for Puebla de Sanabria. We arrived in the afternoon and went to the Lago de Sanabria. At the lake shores, despite of noisy tourists, plenty of reptiles were found: *Lacerta schreiberi*, *Podarcis guadarramae* and some *Natrix maura*.



If there is nothing else, there still will be *Psammodromus algirus*



Female Lacerta schreiberi



Podarcis guadarramae lusitanicus



Juvenile Podarcis guadarramae lusitanicus

31.08.

We visited a mountain habitat which is populated by Iberolacerta galani. On our way to the mountains we spent plenty of time trying to produce acceptable pictures of Podarcis bocagei and Timon lepidus. As we finally arrived at the Iberolacerta spot, the temperature was extraordinary high and only juvenile and female Iberolacertas were active.



The Lago de Sanabria



Podarcis bocagei



Podarcis bocagei



Comparison of juvenile Podarcis bocagei and Podarcis guadarramae: At P. guadarramae (top) the light dorsolateral stripes are reduced to a dotted line whereas P. bocagei (bottom) has continuous light dorsolateral stripes. (Beware: if this is too much hair-splitting for you – it will get even worse during this report!)



Subadult Timon lepidus



The Sanabria area is the transition zone of *Timon lepidus lepidus* and *Timon lepidus ibericus* – the specimen on the picture is probably *Timon lepidus lepidus*.



Female *Iberolacerta galani* at lunch



Iberolacerta galani



Gentiana pneumonanthes

01.09.

Another hot day. This time, we went to the Iberolacerta habitat in the early morning. We hoped to find some males before it would get too hot. But once again, only females and juveniles were out. Hence, we decided to leave the area and go the Northern Province of Leon – the area where the newly described subspecies *Iberolacerta monticola astur* lives. Driving north, we travelled through spectacular mountain areas with mountain passes of almost 2000 m altitude. Despite of the beautiful scenery we only found a DOR *Coronella austriaca* and some *Podarcis bocagei*. At our destination we found an accommodation in Villablino, the principal town of the area. It turned out that in the whole area there were very few tourists but plenty of nature: the perfect playground for new adventures! In the afternoon, we visited the Puerto de Leitariegos north of Villablino: There, *Iberolacerta monticola cantabrica* occurs whereas the new subspecies "astur" has been described for the mountains south of Villablino. On Puerto de Leitariegos, again, we only saw juvenile and female *Iberolacertas*, no males.



Magic Iberolacerta habitat



Juvenile Iberolacerta galani



On Alto del Penon



Coronella austriaca (not so fresh)



Alto del Morredello



Female *Iberolacerta monticola cantabrica*...



...and another one

02.09.

The hottest day of the trip. Anyhow, we wanted to try our luck with *Iberolacerta monticola astur*. Near Los Bajos, we drove uphill as far as it was possible with our rental car. Afterwards we started hiking. No lizards at all. At approximately 1600 m we came across a single juvenile *Iberolacerta*, which – after a quick shot, disappeared and didn't come out again. Sweating and swearing, we had to realize that it would still be a long hike to reach the good *Iberolacerta* spots in higher altitudes. After our experiences with the *Iberolacertas* during the last days, we decided to capitulate... The afternoon brought *Anguis fragilis* and the omnipresent lizard of that area – *Podarcis muralis*.



The mountains south of Villablino: this area is definitely a place to come back someday!



This juvenile specimen is our only record of *Iberolacerta monticola astur*



Podarcis muralis: The Villablino area probably defines this species' western distribution limit.



Anguis fragilis



Lycaena virgaureae



Dianthus hyssopifolius

03.09.

We left Villablino towards Leon – with a side trip to Puerto de Somiedo. Up there, we found *Iberolacerta monticola cantabrica* and *Alytes obstetricans* and, nearby, also *Vipera seoanei*. Afterwards we did the long journey through the Castilian plains – an exhausting (not to say boring) trip. In the evening we reached our next station: Atienza in the Northern Guadalajara Province.



At Puerto de Somiedo



Iberolacerta monticola cantabrica - not in situ



Alytes obstetricans – also not in situ



The Babia mountains



Vipera seoanei



"Somewhere in Castile, in a place whose name I do not care to remember..." (Freely adapted from Cervantes)



Yep: We were walking in Don Quijote's footsteps!



The fortress of Atienza

04.09.

The Atienza area is a contact zone of three *Podarcis* species: *Podarcis liolepis* in the north, *Podarcis virescens* in the south and *Podarcis guadarramae* in the west. We wanted to find out if in this contact zone the three species can be clearly distinguished. So we started searching (needless to mention that the weather was still hot and dusty...). In the open landscapes south of Atienza we found some lizards along the Río Salado – although they showed strange colours, they could clearly be identified as *Podarcis virescens*. Only a few kilometres west, the Sierra del Alto Rey marks the foothills of the Sistema Central. On the granite rocks and sandy soils of these mountains *Podarcis guadarramae* could be found. North of this mountain range the landscape is characterized by limestone rocks which are populated by *Podarcis liolepis*. From our herping perspective, everything was in perfect order: three wall lizard species within an area of 20 km, well separated by different habitats – a pleasure for the taxonomist as well as for the nature photographer.



In the dust they shall grovel...



First, we assumed this brownish lizard to be *Podarcis guadarramae*...



...but the blue outer ventral scales and the yellowish tale show that it is *Podarcis virescens*.



The colouration of the females in this population confirms that it is *Podarcis virescens*.



Along Rio Salado we came across several *Matrix maura* with strange chocolate-brown colouration.



The Sierra del Alto Rey



A remarkably big and long tailed female of *Podarcis guadarramae* in the Sierra del Alto Rey – we had seen similar large-sized specimen in the high altitudes of Sera da Estrela (Portugal).



Chalcides striatus



Chalcides striatus



Limestone rocks at Rio del Manadero...



...home of Podarcis liolepis

05.09.

Another dusty day. We left Atienza towards Alto Tajo NP. After having already seen some lonely landscapes during our trip the border between the Provinces Guadalajara and Cuenca capped it all: driving through endless pine forests, no other cars on the road... During a stop-over at the Tajo River we searched for *Natrix natrix* but found juvenile *Malpolon monspessulanus*, instead. In the evening we arrived at our next station, the village of Beteta in Alto Tajo NP.



The upper reaches of Tajo River



Juvenile Malpolon monspessulanus



Only the hardest herpers can handle two Malpolon at once!



Alto Tajo NP: If you love the monotony of endless pine forests this area should be highly recommended.

06.09.

Somewhere in Alto Tajo NP we supposed to find a contact zone of *Podarcis virescens* and *Podarcis liolepis*. So we started hunting for lizards (in late summer heat, the areas near water were most rewarding). At the beautiful Laguna de Tobar, *Timon lepidus* was the most abundant lizard. Not far from here, at Rio Cuervo, we saw some pale coloured wall lizards which could be identified as *Podarcis virescens*. Subsequently, during our trip through the National Park, we came across several wall lizards which all seemed to be *Podarcis virescens*. The north-eastern distribution limit of this species seems to correspond with the drainage area of Rio Tajo (to which belongs Alto Tajo NP). But where was the contact zone with *Podarcis liolepis*?



Laguna de Tobar

*Timon lepidus lepidus*



This male from Puente de Vadillos is supposed to be *Podarcis virescens*: the light dorsolateral stripe is reduced to a dotted line, there is no vertebral stripe.



Two females and a juvenile from the same population: juveniles of this area frequently show an atypical stripe pattern.



A water basin with:




Pelophylax perezi...




...a beautiful *Natrix maura* and...




...wall lizards – presumably also *Podarcis virescens* (top: male, bottom: female)



Flight exercises for the juvenile griffons (*Gyps fulvus*)

07.09.

We drove eastward: At the Nacimiento de Tajo we noticed some quite robust wall lizards, which should be *Podarcis liolepis*, presumably. There seems to be a contact zone of *Podarcis liolepis* and *Podarcis virescens* at the upper Tajo River, indeed. Actually, we had planned to go to Teruel and the Sierra de Gudar but we had to realize that we underestimated the distances. We were about to get lost in the forest... So we decided to change our plans and moved directly to Cuenca, our next station.



Lost in the highlands near the source of Tajo River – once again, we had this Don Quijote feeling...



The father of all Podarcis liolepis

08.09.

We visited the Lagunas de Canada del Hoyo east of Cuenca – a nature reserve with seven karst lakes. Information boards point out that one of the lakes bears the only population of *Emys orbicularis* in the Cuenca Province and that it is a violation of law to introduce exotic turtles in the lakes. Unfortunately, the assumed *Emys* pond is located within fenced private property and it is surrounded by a dense reed belt. So, no *Emys* for us. Furthermore, the *Trachemys scripta* we saw in the other ponds demonstrate that bans rarely have any effect. Anyhow, an exciting area with *Natrix maura*, *Coronella girondica* and some wall lizards, which should seriously destabilize our previous convictions...



The Lagunas de Canada del Hoyo



Trachemys scripta



Coronella girondica



An extraordinary beautiful female of *Podarcis liolepis* – or should this be something else? Note, that according to RENOULT et al. (2010) and GENIEZ et al. (2014) the lizards in this area are *Podarcis liolepis*. In contrast to this, KALIONTZOPOULOU et al. (2011) argue that this area is populated by *Podarcis hispanicus*. So far, we were following the species concept of

Renoult and Geniez, which is mainly based on morphological analysis and which says that *Podarcis hispanicus* is restricted to the extreme south-east of Spain while the major part of Eastern Spain is continuously populated by *Podarcis liolepis*...



...However, this male from the same population raised some doubts: with its colouration, head shape and delicate build it resembles *Podarcis hispanicus* rather than *Podarcis liolepis*. Should *Podarcis hispanicus* be more widespread as we had assumed so far?



Barren landscape at Canada del Hoyo...



...home of *Psammodromus edwardsianus*

09.09.

We could not rest because of our observations on the previous day: If the lizards from Canada del Hoyo really were *Podarcis hispanicus* there could be a contact zone of *Podarcis liolepis*, *Podarcis hispanicus* and *Podarcis virescens* near Cuenca: Canada del Hoyo is about 20 km east of the City of Cuenca, the holotype locality from the description of *Podarcis virescens* by GENIEZ et al. (2014) is situated only 10 km west of Cuenca. With regard to the population of „Ciudad Encantada“ (15 km north of Cuenca) there are different opinions whether this is *Podarcis liolepis* or *Podarcis hispanicus*. So we started another search...



Ciudad Encantada: an absurd touristy place with some rock formations – if you want to visit these rocks you have to pay an entrance fee...



...but anyhow, there are lizards:



For us, they look like *Podarcis liolepis* (top: male, centre: female, bottom: juvenile)



Searching for lizards at the holotype locality of *Podarcis virescens* at Villanueva de los Escuderos...



...and the *Podarcis virescens* from that place (top: male, centre: female, bottom: juvenile) – the male shows the characteristic dotted light dorsolateral line; the female shows the characteristic yellowish tail and the absence of a vertebral line.



Nearby, along Rio Jucar we only came across lizards which we couldn't clearly identify: in 7 km distance only from the *Podarcis virescens* spot at Villanueva de los Escuderos we found this nice-coloured female – also *Podarcis virescens*?



Four specimens from the same population: the absence of yellowish tails, a well-defined vertebral line and the continuous light dorsolateral line argue against *Podarcis virescens*. Should this already be *Podarcis liolepis*? Or even *hispanicus*? Has *Podarcis liolepis* (respectively *hispanicus*) populated this area along the valley of Rio Jucar and met *Podarcis virescens* at the headwaters of Rio Jucar? We were confused...



Podarcisvirescensliolepishispanicus: Previously, we believed to more or less know the Iberian wall lizard stuff – now we knew that we did not. Maybe we were already tilting against windmills...

10.09.

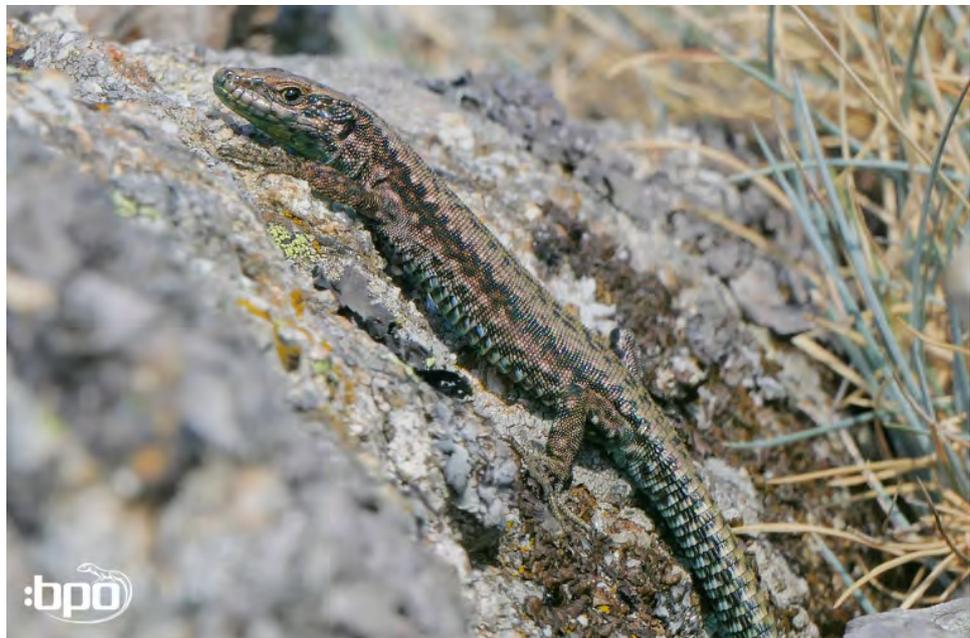
We needed some timeout from the Iberian wall lizards and left the Province Cuenca towards Sierra de Guadarrama. When we arrived, we went to the Puerto de la Morcuera to search for *Iberolacerta cyreni cyreni*. Again, we only found females and juveniles (Did we mention that it still was hot?).



At Puerto de la Morcuera



Capra pyrenaica



Iberolacerta cyreni cyreni

11.09.

Once again: towards Puerto de la Morcuera and again only unmotivated female *Iberolacerta*s and *Podarcis guadarramae*. Thereafter, we went to the Puerto de Navafria, where we found numerous hatchlings of *Podarcis muralis* basking on a wall. Finally, we came across a nice subadult *Malpolon*. After that, we moved to Madrid, where we spent the last days of this trip (In Madrid, our main focus was *Homo sapiens* – therefore this episode is of minor interest for a herpetological report).



Happy cows



Podarcis guadarramae *guadarramae*



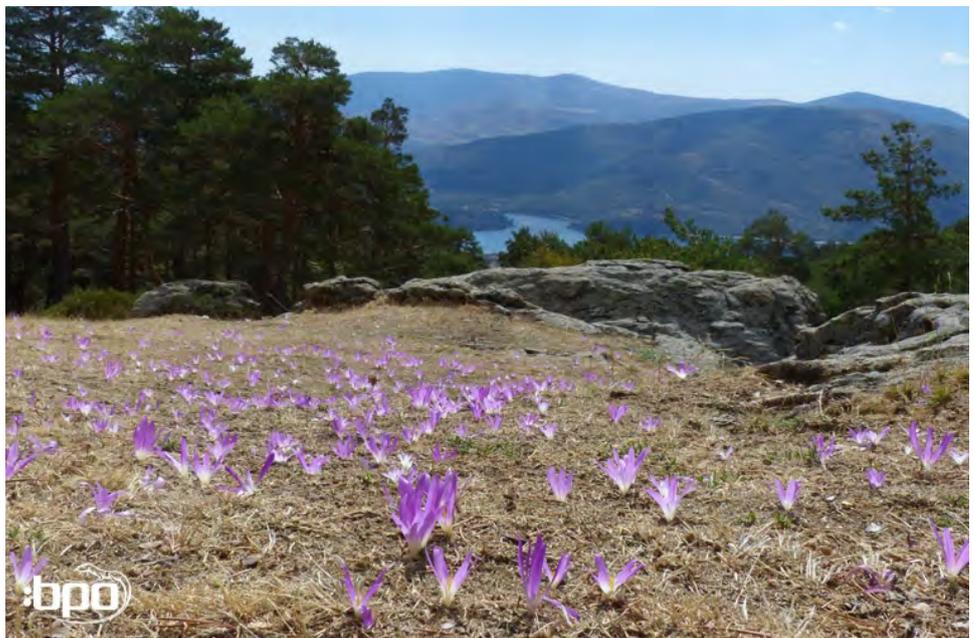
A wall full of lizards



Juvenile Podarcis muralis



Basking on the trousers is quite comfortable!



Merendera montana



Eublemma purpurina



Malpolon monspessulanus



Madrid



In memory of our adventures this monument has been built in the centre of Madrid (Cervantes-Memorial).

The home of European lizards - by Birgit & Peter Oefinger!