

Northernmost Horvath's Rock Lizard Populations, the *Vipera xanthina* Complex and the Meaning of a Correct Herpetology:

Within What Limits Should Authors of Science Act ?

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Do you remember the curious story of Piltdown's man? If not, you can read the wonderful book of a real scientist, STEPHEN J. GOULD (1983) of Harvard - the author of the "punctuated equilibria" theory -, for remembering it. Although we cannot summarize it in this paper, you are enough to know that the Piltdown's man - one of the greatest palaeontological discoveries of the XXth century - was a real scientific fraud.

As many historians of science well know, such a fraud influenced in a too great degree the following world of scientists that a surprising amount of further frauds - some demonstrated and several simply suspected - were evidenced in all the sciences, from the "hard" disciplines (physics, mathematics, etc.) to the "sweet" ones (natural sciences) (see KOHN 1986).

If herpetology is a science - note "if" it is not surprising that such suspects are present in our discipline, also (see the famous case of KAMMERER's *Alytes obstetricans*) (see KOESTLER 1972). Recently, two cases of violent acritude among different scientific staffs have been observed in European herpetology. Obviously, none of such cases was so hard for invoking proud, but, however, they merit to be considered for providing improvements in the actions of scientific staffs and journals. The first case - the most unpleasant in our opinion - was related with the complex status of the viper *Vipera xanthina* in the Near East, and had the Swedish scientists NILSON & ANDRÉN against the herpetologists SCHÄTTI, BARAN & SIGG (see NILSON & ANDRÉN 1992, SCHÄTTI et al. 1992). Based on strongly diverging opinions, the latter staff criticized a number of NILSON & ANDRÉN's studies in a very long article (SCHÄTTI et al. 1991). This would be completely acceptable within a scientific debate, but the problem is that such a long paper appears in most cases as a gratuitously aggressive work, involved in evidencing more the "errors" of NILSON & ANDRÉN rather than the merits of the paper itself. Again, SCHÄTTI et al. (1991) used phrases too violent and provocative (e.g., see note 7 at page 324: "the "difference" of ... is pure fiction") that clearly impede any further "civil" debate. Why should authors of science use such a type of words? Why serious scientists (NILSON & ANDRÉN, in this case) should be uncorrectly "attacked" by some their colleagues? And another question arises: Is the journal publishing "unpleasant" papers responsible for uncorrect behaviour? We think yes, if that journal (i.e. Amphibia-Reptilia, in the specific case reported here) does not permit to injured authors to reply in the same issue of the provocative article. Independently on where is the reason, it is very unpleasant that one author is entitled to reply more than one year after the original injury! This, let us to tell you, is not a correct way of doing science.

The second case is less spectacular - essentially because in involving a debate on one small paper and not on a number of longer and more detailed studies as in the former case - but not less folkloristic! It involved the authors of the present paper against some "unknown" German herpetologists¹. It resulted from our brief paper on the discovery of *Lacerta horvathi* in Karwendel Gebirge (CAPULA & LUISELLI 1990). This short paper produced a surprisingly strong reaction in our German colleagues, so that letters, maps invoking information, and other material was sent us. In August 1991, at the congress of Societas Europaea Herpetologica held in Budapest, we

¹ The term "unknown" means "herpetologists that did not use their real name during this debate, thus resulting unknown by W, and it does not mean "herpetologists" whose name is scientifically unknown and, therefore, not reliable.

met some German colleagues, taking the decision of carrying out a joint survey in the following August 1992. After a few weeks this plan was confirmed in a meeting held in Florence between us and another German herpetologists. While this was planning, prof. LANZA (Florence) informed us that an incredible article appeared in DIE EIDECHSE, December 1991 (see FABERL & FABERL 1991). After a brief introductory note of H.K. NETTMANN, it started such a "pseudo-scientific" article that, by means of partially auto-ironic and not too covertly sarcastic words, polemized with our previous discovery. One should read this article for understanding up to which limits an author of science can arrive! Absurde citations (e.g., that of PLINIUS [Pompeji, 1990!!!]) and other kinds of sarcastic material dressed this "wonderful" (and, we must admit, amusing) paper. But, more than all, the principal "characteristic" of this paper was that the authors did not use their real names, but only pseudonyms!!! Curiously, even in this case and despite our planning established with German colleagues, we were not informed by DIE EIDECHSE about the publication of such a clearly non-scientific paper (this was even more surprising because the same journal published a objective note on our paper in number 3, pp. 17-19 [see BISCHOFF 1991]). After this, our reaction was very hard: really unpleasant letters were sent to some of our German colleagues and an autonomous research plan was established for 1992. The results were rather good, as other lizards were found by various researchers (in different times by L. RUGIERO, L. LUISELLI & H.-J. GRUBER), clarifying that some *Lacerta horvathi* are really present in Karwendel Gebirge.

What does this mean? Obviously, this does not mean that Horvath's rock lizards are autochthonous in southern Bavaria - we realize that there is a clear linear distance between the localities known in Austria and the Karwendel ones -, but, because much more than 10 specimens were seen (several of them are actually maintained alive for ecological, morphometrical, and electrophoretical studies), this suggests the real presence of the species in southern Germany (note that we have found even pregnant females and juveniles!). This also provides evidence that sarcasm was not justified and that, before writing, it is better to search for verity. Remember that "risus abundat in ore stultorum"!! Moreover, note that one author merits to be considered as reliable only if he is able to use his real name, without hiding within false identity. We were tempted to sign this paper as "ERNESTO CHE GUEVARA & FIDEL CASTRO" or as "JULIA ROBERTS & WHITNEY HOUSTON", but, with all due respect to our readers and even to our "enemies" (please consider this word as only symbolic), we have preferred to use our less famous (and, especially with regard to the second couple of names, less fascinating! birth names. In future, please follow our example.

For 1993 and following years - being us interested in the true history of *Lacerta horvathi* of Karwendel Gebirge exactly as our German colleagues - we are planning to carry out a more detailed research. It will be of some interest to understand, e.g. , (1) what is the real distribution of the species, (2) what is the real origin of the Karwendel populations, (3) what are the main ecological characteristics of these populations. Unfortunately, because Rome is far from Munich, we need of help. If German researchers are interested in a joint research, we will be happy to collaborate without any resentment with them. We will be happy to co-work even with FABERL & FABERL (if you are reading, please give us a letter enclosing your real name(s)), having a calliper (for measuring lizards) on the right hand and a cold beer on the left one. Consider that cooperation and friendship is much more convenient for scientific researches than acritude and individualism. Moreover, if in 2003 we will not find more lizards (but we really doubt of this), we, together, will conclude that these were probably introduced without acclimatization. If we will find many specinens (as we think), we will stress opposite conclusions. However, it is without any meaning that we will continue to publish contradicting and, sometimes, aggressive papers every second month in the hope to provide new data on this subject. Moreover, we hope that all material published on this subject will be exchanged among us. If you are interested, please contact us. We are ready to collaborate!

If a equilibrated and objective research will be done, but only in this case, both us in Rome and you in Germany will be meritorious of having contributed to a good science, i.e., for using a very famous

sentence of FIDEL CASTRO, "History will assolve us !".

In conclusion, we hope that (1) cases of violent acritude such as those described here will repeat less and less in the future years, and that (2) these unpleasant cases will serve to European herpetologists as examples for improving their scientific merits, going from a passionated way of investigating to a more equilibrated, pertinent behaviour. WE MUST TRY TO CREATE HERPETOLOGY AS A REAL SCIENCE, and not as a pseudo-scientific point of view!

Acknowledgements

One of us (LL) is indebted to HANS-JÜRGEN GRUBER and his friends for their very friendly hospitality in Munich during August 1992. Without their effort, our cooperation with German colleagues would be not possible. Moreover, we thank WOLFGANG BISCHOFF for having permitted us to use the pages of DIE EIDECHSE for this note.

Die nördlichsten Populationen der Kroatischen Gebirgseidechse, der *Vipera xanthina*-Komplex und die Bedeutung einer korrekten Herpetologie: Innerhalb welcher Grenzen sollten sich wissenschaftliche Autoren bewegen?

Die Autoren haben mit großem Mißvergnügen zur Kenntnis genommen, daß die von ihnen 1991 im Herpetological Journal veröffentlichte Entdeckung dreier *Lacerta horvathi*-Vorkommen in Bayern (!) zu einem unter dem Pseudonym FABERL & FABERL verfaßten Artikel in "Die Eidechse" führten, in dem die Seriosität dieser Nachweise angezweifelt wird. Sie verweisen hier auf einschlägige Beispiele wie den "Piltown man" oder den Streit um KAMMERERS Geburtshelferkröten. Diese pseudonyme Entgegnung wird hier mit der Arbeit von SCHÄTTI, BARAN & SIGG (1992) verglichen, in der diese Autoren die Schlußfolgerungen von NILSON & ANDREN (1992) zur Taxonomie der Berggottern des *Vipera xanthina*-Komplexes kritisieren. Es wird energisch für eine absolut polemik-freie Wissenschaft plädiert und besonderes Gewicht darauf gelegt, daß kritische Autoren unter ihrem richtigen Namen und nicht unter einem Pseudonym publizieren, das ihre Identität verbirgt. Außerdem wird von den Autoren kritisiert, daß sie erst jetzt, ein Jahr nach dem pseudonymen FABERL & FABERL-Artikel, die Gelegenheit zu ihrer Erwiderung haben. Sie hätten erwartet, von der Redaktion der "Eidechse" sofort über das Vorliegen des sie kritisierenden Artikels zu erfahren. Immerhin empfinden sie Genugtuung, wenigstens jetzt (besser als gar nicht) ihre Erwiderung in "Die Eidechse" bringen zu können. Sie möchten alle aufgekommenen Mißstimmungen zwischen deutschen und italienischen Herpetologen beendet wissen und bieten nun eine uneingeschränkte, aber offene Kooperation mit deutschen Herpetologen zur weiteren Erforschung ihrer spektakulären Entdeckung an!

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Anmerkung der Redaktion:

Als wir uns entschlossen, den Bericht über den "*Archelacerta-horvathi*-Komplex" von FABERL & FABERL im Heft 4 der "Eidechse" zu publizieren, taten wir dies in der Überzeugung, daß "Die Eidechse" keine allgemein zugängliche wissenschaftliche Publikationsreihe, sondern eben das interne Mitteilungsblatt der AG Lacertiden in der DGHT ist! Deshalb hatten wir keine Probleme, diesen - teils selbstironisch gemeinten - "bayerischen Beitrag" unter einem Pseudonym zu drucken. DIE EIDECHSE erreicht jedoch inzwischen einen viel größeren Leserkreis, und so haben auch MASSIMO CAPULA und LUCA LUISELLI unvorbereitet den besagten Beitrag zur Kenntnis nehmen müssen. Sprachliche Feinheiten einschließlich (selbst)ironischer Formulierungen kommen nur in der Muttersprache richtig "über", und so führte der FABERL & FABERL'sche Aufsatz zu erheblichen Mißverständnissen und zur Verärgerung bei unseren italienischen Kollegen und Freunden, die von unserer Seite ganz sicher nicht beabsichtigt waren. Es ist für uns eine Selbstverständlichkeit, jetzt MASSIMO CAPULA und LUCA LUISELLI die Möglichkeit zu geben eine Erwiderung zu publizieren. Wir möchten Sie, liebe Leser der "EIDECHSE" um Verständnis dafür bitten, daß wir den Text in der englischen Originalfassung abdrucken. Es bestände sonst die Gefahr, daß durch die Übersetzung, jetzt andersherum, bestimmte Aussagen ihrem Sinn nach nicht korrekt wiedergegeben werden. Speriamo molto che le differenze spiacevoli che turbavano questa faccenda sarebbero terminate, visto che l'articolo sovrastante termina molto conciliabile. Ma è nostra gran speranza e ne saremmo molto lieto se potremmo giungere ad una collaborazione amichevole e fruttifera fra i nostri colleghi italiani e noi altri. (Wir hoffen sehr, daß die leidigen Unstimmigkeiten in dieser Angelegenheit damit ausgeräumt sind, zumal der obenstehende Aufsatz sehr versöhnlich endet. Unsere Hoffnung ist auch, und wir würden uns sehr darüber freuen, wenn es jetzt letztendlich zu einer fruchtbringenden, freundschaftlichen Zusammenarbeit mit unseren italienischen Kollegen kommt.)