

# Herpetological Trip Report Croatia April 13th till May 8th 2013

from Michael Wilms

From 13/04/2013 until 08/05/2013 I took my first trip to Croatia.

The entire trip was planned with the focus to find animals (especially reptiles) to determine and take pictures. The main focus was on the lookout for snakes.

But also beautiful landscapes and other interesting animals that came in front of my lens, I gratefully took pictures of. Especially my interest for some beautiful butterfly species was also awakened for the first time on this trip.

Since I made the journey not alone, the trip report is written in plural, but because my companions had no particular interest in Herping I made many trips alone (and therefore some parts are written in singular).



- 1) National park Plitvice lakes
- 2) National park Krka waterfalls
- 3) Pakostane and Vransko Jezero (Lake Vrana)
- 4) National park Paklenica
- 5) Island Pag

## Plitvice lakes

After two days of arrival on April 13th and 14th with a stopover in Carinthia (Austria) we arrived in the afternoon of April 14th at our first trip stop, a campground near the Plitvice Lakes. On the campground were just ten caravans and motorhomes.

On that first evening in Croatia, I made around 22:30 my first animal search using a UV LED flashlight that I had specially gained for the Scorpion search. After a short search on several ungrouted natural stone walls, I had success at a ungrouted natural stone foundation of small log cabins that should be rented to tourists in the season but were uninhabited now. I was amazed at how well my UV flashlight worked. I discovered 3 European scorpions (*Euscorpium* sp.). I did not really expect success, as the evening was quite cold with 9-10 degrees Celsius. Two sat deep in cracks and I could only see their out-looking scissors, but one scrambled over the wall outside and I caught him in a small plastic terrarium. The following day, I observed and photographed the scorpion and set it free on the evening of the following day after I experimented with taking photos of it under UV light. The results were better than I expected.



European scorpion (*Euscorpium* sp.), on right in the night under UV light





The following day, April 15th, we visited the national park Plitvice Lakes. The nature and lakes with waterfalls were breathtaking. As a result of the long winter many of the lower paths directly on the lakes were still flooded and partially impassable. Nevertheless we partially walked a flooded path and even had to take our shoes off in some places and walked barefoot through the ice water over the sharp stones. There was still a lot of snow on the upper lakes. So we saw the waterfalls probably more rapid than in high season and maybe also some minor waterfalls beside do not exist in the summer. The fauna of the national park delighted us with some mountain lizards and 5 Eastern green lizards (*Lacerta viridis*), some of them directly next to snow rests.



National park Plitvice lakes, Veliki Slap (highest waterfall), with 78m high the highest waterfall of Croatia





National park Plitvice lakes in April, in the higher regions there are still snow rests between the trees and the meltwater flows down everywhere



National park Plitvice lakes in April, in the lower regions are some footbridges still closed because of the much meltwater





National park Plitvice lakes in middle regions



Eastern green lizard (*Lacerta viridis*) not far away of snow rests in NP Plitvice lakes in April



### Krka national park

The next morning the journey continued south to the Krka waterfalls. Here we pitched our camp on a small campsite in Lozovac near the national park. As soon as we crossed on the arrival of the mountain range to the sea through a long tunnel, a completely different world showed. All plants and trees that had been at the Plitvice Lakes approximately equal developed to Germany, here on the coast they were at least four weeks ahead. The trees were completely leafy and floral blossoms showed diversity. The area around our campsite was found quite sparse with waist-high bushes and heavily traversed by old stone walls. In between, there were also always small pine forest, where the pines were more bushy and maximum chest high. A first exploration of the area in the afternoon till sunset brought the knowledge that this area was heavily traversed by orb weaver spider webs. It was almost impossible to move without destroying spider webs. The field trip brought the discovery of a Balkan green lizard (*Lacerta trilineata*), who lived in an old dilapidated stone wall in a bush. Finally I found the first snake just before sunset. A Leopard snake (*Zamenis situla*), which is often described as the most beautiful snakes in Europe. Unfortunately, I discovered it notices me and was already fleeing between a long and knee-high stone wall. So I only got a few blurry shots, and some sharp shots of a small part of the body. A little later awarded me the nature of this barren plain with a beautiful sunset.



Three-lined lizard (*Lacerta trilineata*)

The next day we planned to visit the Krka national park and therefore we started early in the morning. First we went to Skradin and got the information, when the boats in the national park start. We had to wait an hour to the departure of the boat and waited in a small park, where I watched some Italian wall lizards (*Podarcis sicula*). As I hoped, on the boat ride I discovered the first Grass snake (*Natrix natrix* ssp.). Unfortunately, too far and too fast for sharp and good photos. The trail on the boardwalks of the lower Krka National parks revealed a beautiful nature with unique river sections, partly jungle-like overgrown, sometimes with great waterfalls. The wildlife showed a Balkan whip snake (*Hierophis gemonensis*), which I discovered after a few meters (though at some distance, so that a determination was only possible through the 300m-telephoto lens), many Sand lizards (*Lacerta agilis*), two Dice snakes (*Natrix tessellata*), a juvenile and a baby, as well as several Common brown frog (*Rana temporaria*).

The baby dice snake was curled up in the middle of the trail and was implemented by me at appropriate place.



Italian wall lizards (*Podarcis sicula*)





Dice snake (*Natrix tessellata*), juvenile



Dice snake (*Natrix tessellata*), baby



The next day we took a trip by car to the middle and upper part of the Krka National Park. Here a unique nature revealed, too. In the headwaters large and richly draped fig trees stood in the middle of the river. A great sight! Herpetological the trip took an indefinite toad, which I saw at the river bed of a quiet river side arm, and in addition to numerous Sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), a few European Green lizards (*Lacerta viridis*) and again several Dice snakes (*Natrix tessellata*), all of them in the water and mostly diving under water.



Krka river in the middle part of the national park



Indefinite toad  
on river bed at a quite  
river side arm of the Krka



In the evening I again searched for animals near the camp at Lozovac and found several European green lizards (*Lacerta viridis*) and Dalmatian Wall Lizards (*Podarcis melisellensis*) and a lot of creepy-crawlies. Turing around some stones I found a lot of myriapods. Finally, I found a young Four-lined snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*) in juvenile coloration only a few meters away from the place where I discovered the Leopard snake (*Zamenis situla*) a day before. The next morning I found at the same location a Balkan whip snake (*Hierophis gemonensis*).



Dalmatian wall lizards (*Podarcis melisellensis*)



Four-lined snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*), juvenile





Balkan whip snake (*Hierophis gemonensis*)

#### Pakostane & Vransko Jezero (Lake Vrana)

The next station of our trip was Pakostane, located on the coast near the Vransko Jezero (Lake Vrana), the largest lake in Croatia. Here we stayed for the next 5 days. I visited the lake two times, but searched more the bushy landscapes near the coast for snakes and land turtles. At this excursions I found many Sheltopusiks (*Pseudopus apodus*) or European legless lizards, some Sand lizards (*Lacerta agilis*), European green lizards (*Lacerta viridis*), one Balkan whip snake (*Hierophis gemonensis*) and four Dalmatian Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo hermanni boettgeri*). All turtles I found in a small area of maybe 20 m<sup>2</sup>, at all 3 female and 1 male.

The rest of the animal world showed me some beautiful butterflies (including a Swallowtail), some species of grasshoppers, centipedes, some other myriapods and pill millipede, and some nice crab spiders and jumping spiders, e.g. Red bellied jumping spider (*Philaeus chrysops*).





Dalmatian Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo hermanni boettgeri*) in its habitat



Dalmatian Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo hermanni boettgeri*) in its habitat



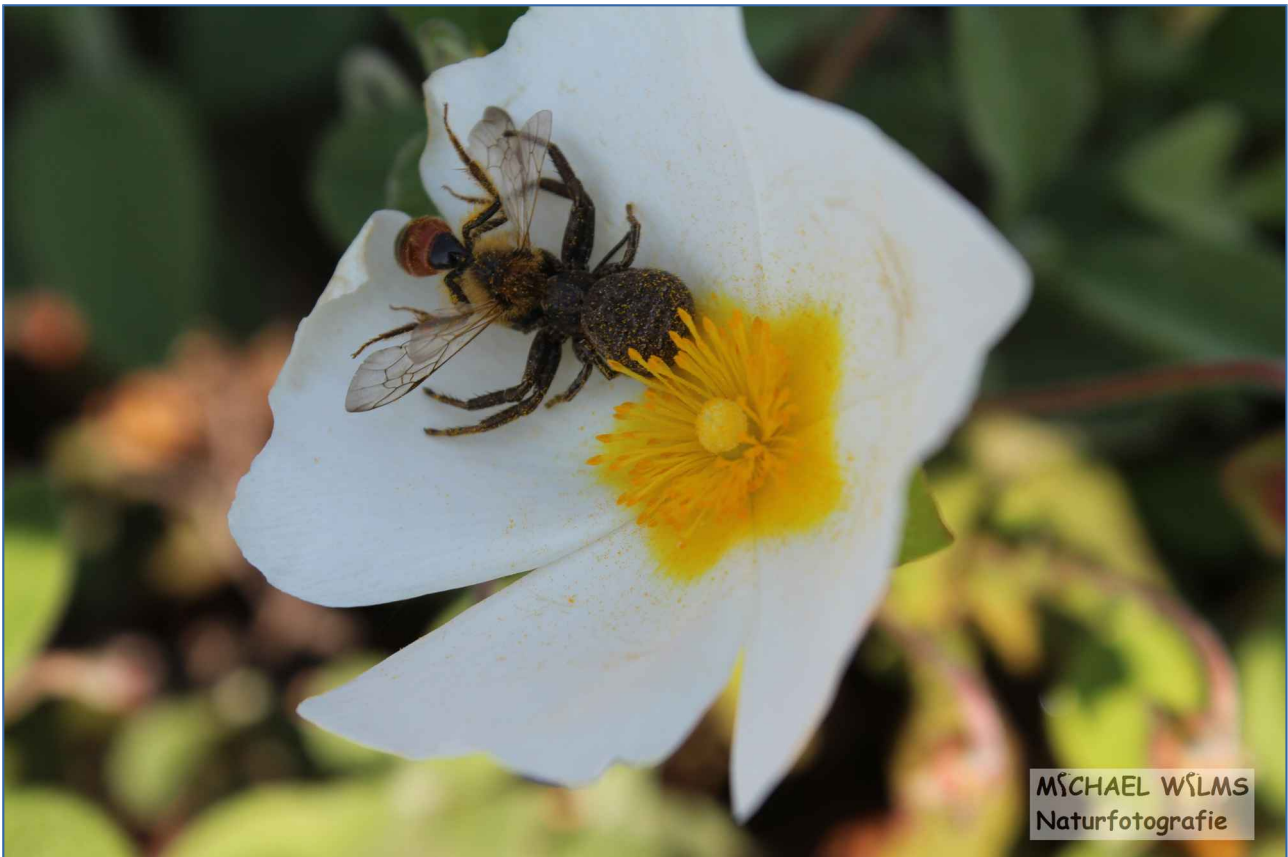


Dalmatian Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo hermanni boettgeri*) in its habitat



Sheltopusik (*Pseudopus apodus*)  
or European legless lizard





Crab spider with prey



Red bellied jumping spider  
(*Philaeus chrysops*)

### Paklencia national park

After the time around Pakostane our trip brought us to Starigrad near the entrance of the Paklenica national Park in the southern Velebit Mountains. We just arrived in Starigrad when flowering tamarisk trees with beautiful Scarce Swallowtail (*Iphiclides podalirius*) pleased me.

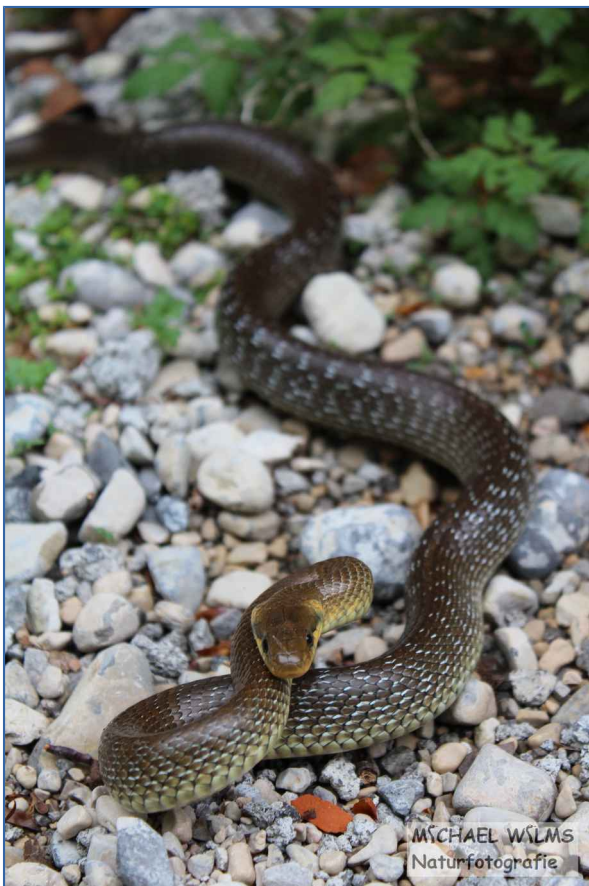


Overall, the area around the Velebit mountains showed to be extremely diverse, in terms of butterflies and moths. So I found several specimens of the beautiful Southern festoon butterfly (*Zerynthia polyxena*) and many different butterflies, that I did not count, photograph and determine (e.g. peacock butterflies, tortoiseshell butterflies, fritillary butterflies). The next four days I made many excursions in the Paklenica national park, also a two-day trip with an overnight stay in a mountain cabin in the national park (480 m a.s.l.).

In the coastal area herpetological dominated the Sheltopusik (*Pseudopus apodus*). Ongoing it rustled somewhere and one of this acting loud and clumsy Lizards took to their heels. Throughout the national park I found numerous European green lizards (*Lacerta viridis*) in the upper part and the Balkan green lizard (*Lacerta trilineata*) and in the central region a Blue-throated keeled lizard (*Algyroides nigropunctatus*). In the central region of the partially quite densely vegetated valley near the creek I found twice a Aesculapian snake (*Zamenis longissimus*), once at noon and the next day morning shortly after 7 clock (before the sun didn't reach the valley bottom). Also a young Grass snake (*Natrix natrix* ssp.), several Slow worms (*Anguis fragilis*) and a pregnant female Fire salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*) I found in the middle section of the way up near the creek.

After an overnight stay in the rustic mountain cabin I spent a whole day in the upper mountainous region of the national park. Here dominated Green lizards (*Lacerta viridis* and *trilineata*), Dalmatian wall lizards (*Podarcis melisellensis*) and Italian wall lizards (*Podarcis sicula*). But mainly I was seeking for the Nose-horned viper (*Vipera ammodytes*), also called Sand viper, and I found them at an old stone wall. Two adult male specimens, one directly in front of the wall and one in the mid-morning sun in a bare chest-high tree.

Patiently they endured to my delight a photo shoot.



Aesculapian snake (*Zamenis longissimus*), caught attended to a national park ranger





Nose-horned or sand viper (*Vipera ammodytes*) in higher mountainous region of the Paklencia national park (Velebit mountains)



Nose-horned or sand viper (*Vipera ammodytes*) in deadwood in its habitat in the Velebit mountains (left and above)





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Naturfotografie

Nose-horned or sand viper (*Vipera ammodytes*) in branches



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European green lizards (*Lacerta viridis*) in Velebit mountains, also habitat of *V. Ammodytes*



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Dalmatian wall lizards (*Podarcis melisellensis*)



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Blue-throated keeled lizard (*Algyroides nigropunctatus*)





Grass snake (*Natrix natrix* ssp.) in Paklenica national park in a valley near a creek



Fired salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*), gravid female in Paklenica national park

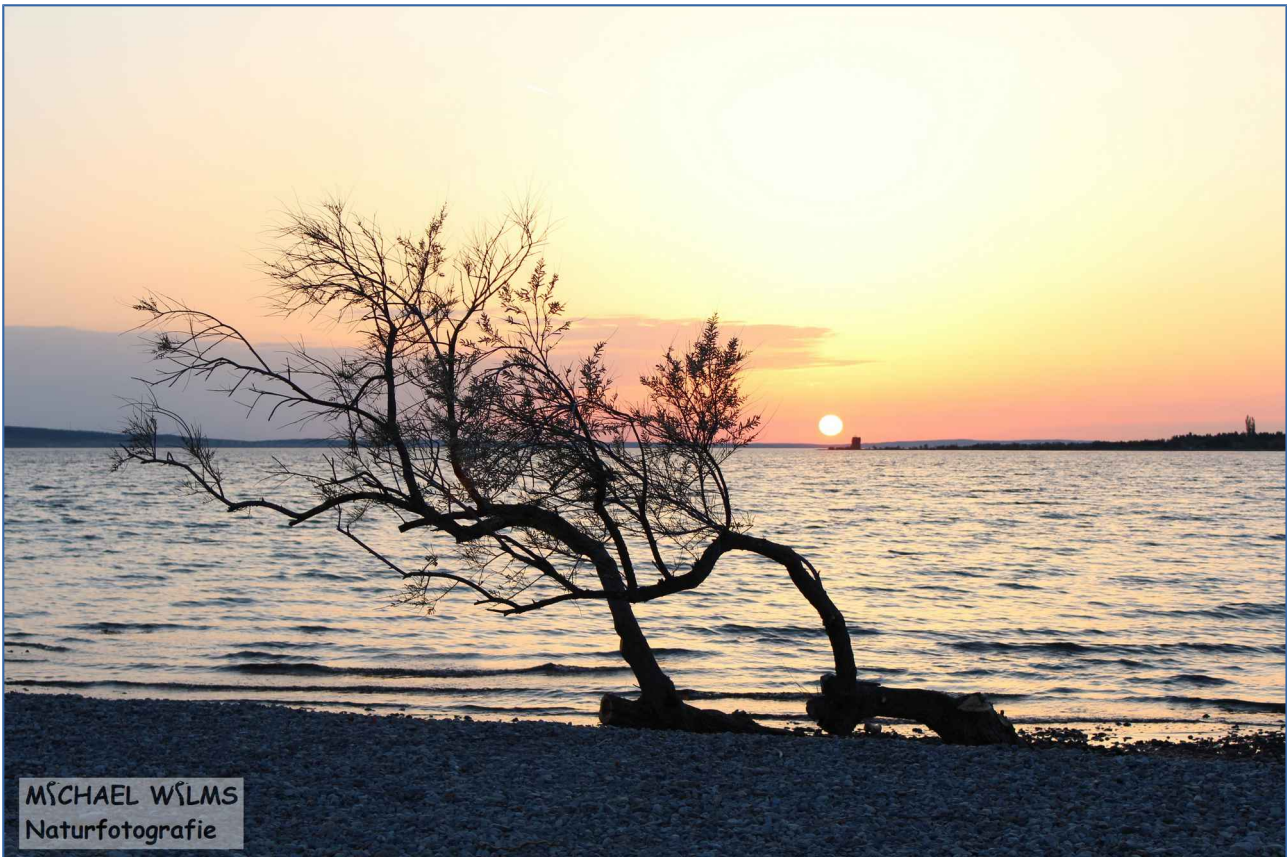


Scarce Swallowtail  
(*Iphiclides podalirius*)

Southern festoon butterfly  
(*Zerynthia polyxena*)







Sunset on the coast of Starigrad in front of Paklenica national park (southern Velebit mountains)

### Island Pag

The last week of the trip (the first week of May) we spent on the island of Pag. The starting point was a camp site in Novalja. From here, I explored the island with some trips and found some beautiful places, landscapes and natural habitats.

On this island there are on one hand absolutely barren lunar landscape and on the other hand partially vegetated beautiful places. At the beginning of the first few kilometers when traveling to the island over the bridge, you do not even expect to get a plant to face, but there are some green areas. I especially liked the northern peninsula Lun with its 1000 year old olive trees. Here I found especially Balkan whip snakes (*Hierophis gemonensis*) and a Leopard snake (*Zamenis situla*), which was unfortunately DOR (dead on road). Also a male tortoise (*Testudo hermanni boettgeri*) I found here in the northern part of the island in the middle of the street and put it a few meters from the road in a suitable habitat.

On the island there are several ponds and wetlands, where I discovered some European pond turtles (*Emys obicularis*), unfortunately they were mostly impassable swamps or far from the shore, so I hardly get good photos of them. Also to dragonflies struck me here on a wide variety.

The most dominant species of reptile was once again the Sheltopusik (*Pseudopus apodus*), which showed up in large numbers.

On the penultimate day of the trip I finally found a live specimen of a Leopard snake (*Zamenis situla*) on the eastern peninsula near the village of Metajna, which I also could get good photos of.

Such long I had been looking for this kind of snake and only found it dead or I was too slow and they fled before I got a good photo. But now I was still rewarded at the end of the trip and could tell yourself that this species has actually earned their reputation for being one of the most beautiful snakes in Europe.





The 1000 year old olive trees on the peninsula Lun (Island Pag) surrounded by stone walls, a habitat for many reptiles



In the stone walls I found several times Balkan whip snakes (*Hierophis gemonensis*)



Typical habitat of the European pond turtles (*Emys obicularis*) on the island Pag





Leopard snake (*Zamenis situla*) on the island Pag







Leopard snake (*Zamenis situla*) on the island Pag



## Species List (only reptiles)

### Serpentes (snakes)

Elaphe quatuorlineata  
Hierophis gemonensis  
Natrix natrix sp.  
Natrix tessellata  
Vipera ammodytes  
Zamenis longissimus  
Zamenis situla

### Testudines (turtles)

Emys obicularis  
Testudo hermanni boettgeri

### Lacertilia (lizards)

Algyroides nigropunctatus  
Lacerta agilis  
Lacerta trilineata  
Lacerta viridis  
Podarcis melisellensis  
Podarcis sicula

Pseudopus apodus

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