
NIGHT-ACTIVITY BY *VIPERA LEBETINA SCHWEIZERI*
DURING WARM WEATHER?

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The Levantine viper is found from North-Africa and south-west Asia with several sub-species. This species also lives in Europe. Here however, its range is limited to some Greek islands of the Western Cyclades: Milos (Milos viper), Kimolos, Siphnos, Polyagos and perhaps Kithnos and Antimilos.

Here I am concerned with the subspecies *Vipera lebetina schweizeri*, named after Hans Schweizer, who was first to show that this sub-species is an egg-layer.

Vipera lebetina is known to be diurnal but on hot days (in summer) it becomes active at night. This is suspected of the European subspecies too (Arnold et al., 1978), but was never observed by Schweizer. Brodman (1978) writes in his book: "Schweizer again and again tried to observe night activity of this viper but never succeeded in doing so".

In July 1988 we paid a visit of five days to the island of Milos and stayed in the harbour town of Adamas. During that time of year the day temperature is 35°C and the night temperature 22°C. An old Greek gardener told us that a "special snake of Milos" could be found along a certain dirtroad. This track which starts about 30 metres from the sea is situated between dry pieces of farmland and open fields. Along it are some houses and now and again a car passes by.

The first night we visited this path we soon found a levant viper. The animal, which was about 60 cm long, was crawling in a dry field, next to the track. The next night we again found a viper about 200 metres from the previous spot. This one was lying halfway up a bank in front of a hollow. Through the disturbance of the flashlight the animal vanished into this.

During daytime, early in the morning and late in the afternoon we searched this path, but we did not find any vipers, however, we found a great many Milos lizards (*Podarcis milensis*). We searched the rest of the island too, such as dry riverbeds, but did not find any vipers. We did find a runover animal on the track and elsewhere a dead juvenile animal. So it seems that *Vipera lebetina schweizeri*, like all other sub-species, becomes active at nighttime when the weather gets warm. On the above mentioned path we also found



Foto 1. *Telescopus fallax*, Milos. Foto: E. Even.

three cat snakes (*Telescopus fallax*) at night. They could be picked up easily. Rats and Aegean geckos (*Cyrtodactylus hotschy*) were seen there frequently at night too.

We also visited the more northern island of Siphnos: here we did not find any vipers; dead or alive. A restaurant owner on the island told us that a couple of years before he had met a man from Denmark who carried a box full of snakes with him. The snakes were milked after which they were released. The brother of the restaurant owner once was bitten in his foot; after the bite it swelled up very much and never completely healed again. This must have been a Milos viper as no other poisonous snakes occur on this island (Arnold et al., 1978).

We travelled to Kithnos as well and did not find any vipers here either. We did not go to Kimolos, Polyagos and Antimilos.

REFERENCES

- Arnold, E.N., J.A. Burton & D.W. Oviden, 1978.
Elseviers reptile and amphibian guide.
- Brodman, Peter, 1987. Die Giftschlange Europa's.