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Corsica, 07.-17.09.2013

So far, our twitching list lacked of one spectacular lizard species: *Archaeolacerta bedriagae*. Our trip to Corsica should close this gap – and it delivered: extensive photo sessions with these lizards brought phantastic shots! Other target species of this trip were *Algyroides fitzingeri* and *Euleptes europaea*. Thanks to Matt Wilson, Jeroen Speybroeck and GertJan Verspui.



Good morning, Corsica!

In Corsica, *Archaeolacerta bedriagae* occurs in high-altitude mountain areas as well as in some coastal sections. The lowland and highland populations are different in genetic and morphologic regards – we wanted to see both. Hence, the first station of our trip was Corte, a small town in the Center of the Haute Corse mountain area. This part of Corsica has really impressive landscapes – a fact that obviously had been noticed by others before: the complete area was crowded with tourists. So, we had to face fully booked hotels, caravans trying to push through narrow mountain roads and hordes of hikers.

The first spot we visited were the „Cascades des Anglais“ at Vizzavona, an area where *Archeolacerta bedriagae* easily can be photographed. Besides the rock lizards we also saw some *Podarcis tiliguerta* – an omnipresent lizard on Corsica. As some scientific papers have stated that *Podarcis tiliguerta*, an endemic species of Corsica and Sardinia, might be a species complex we shot pictures of these lizard in each station we visited. You never know if there will be some species-splitting sometime...



At the Cascades des Anglais



Pyrenees, 2008 - 2016



Sicily & Aeolian Islands, 2014 - 2016
6.6.2016



Spain, 2014 - 19.2015



11.7.2015



Spain, 29.9. - 14.9.2014



Mallorca / 2016



Soon, the first *Archaeolacerta bedriagae* was found



The rock lizards of this area frequently show „panther patterns“...



...or tiger stripes...



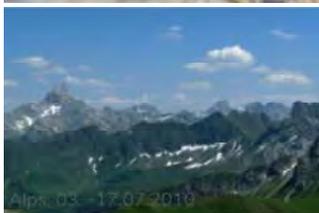
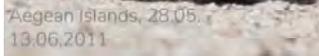
...or nice spots



Archaeolacerta photography



A male Podarcis tiliguerta...



...and a female



A young Discoglossus, having completed its metamorphose – probably Discoglossus montalentii

We visited the Parc de Verghello (North of Vizzavona), a steep, forested mountain valley. There we tried to find *Algyroides fitzingeri* – successfully. This species is supposed to be rather rare on Corsica. But, probably it is frequently overlooked, due to its small size and its secretive behavior.



Algyroides fitzingeri...



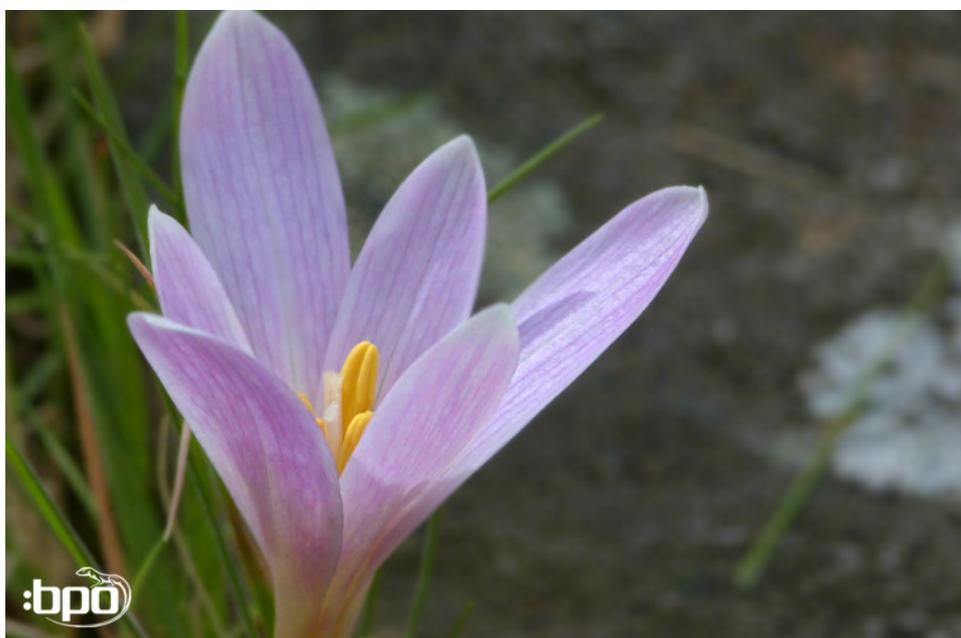
...sometimes, it can be hard to spot these tiny lizards



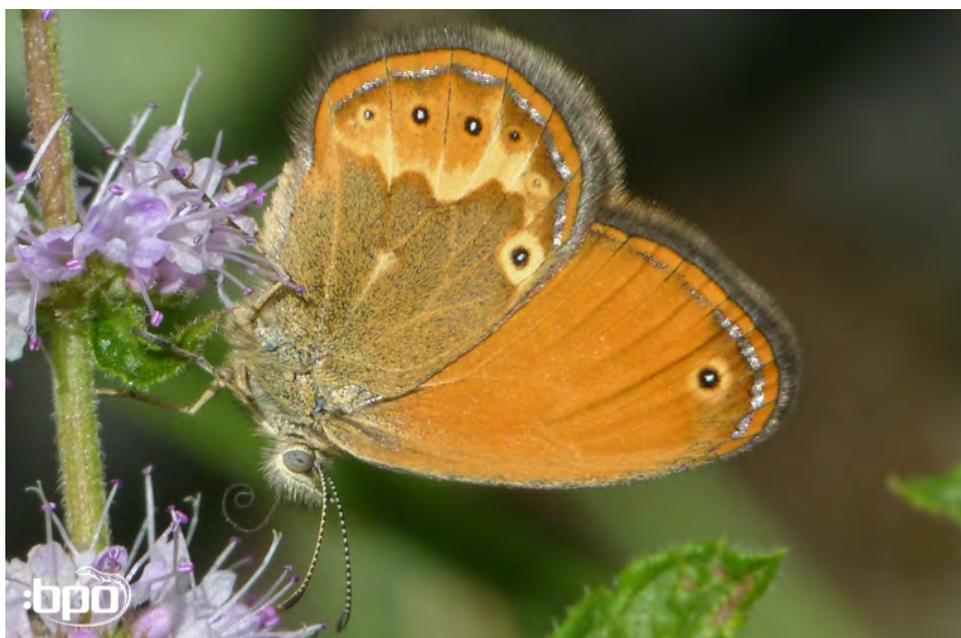
Podarcis tiliguerta from Parc de Verghello



The obligatory orchid picture: *Spiranthes aestivalis* – a new species for us.



Due to its isolated geographic situation a lot of endemic species can be found on Corsica – like this meadow saffron (*Colchicum corsicum*)...



...or this butterfly (*Coenonympha corinna*) which only occurs on Corsica and Sardinia and Capraia island.



Hierophis viridiflavus, basking on the road

We expected the visit of the famous Restonica valley to be a fantastic experience: Driving with the car through this wild gorge up to 1400 m altitude and then start hiking into the wilderness of the mountains – and of course, the local rock lizards were supposed to be quite extraordinary... Reality was a little bit different: an endless convoy of cars trying to pass the narrow mountain road – traffic jam! The fee for the parking at the end of the road was 5 Euros. There, careful referrers assigned individual parking spaces to each car – paying attention that the limited parking space was used efficiently. Up there, the weather was cold and stormy and the mountains were covered by clouds. This didn't deter the crowds of hikers from walking up the mountain trail in an endless human chain – the atmosphere resembled to a shopping mall at the last week-end before Christmas. At first, we courageously joined the hikers' procession. But, as the sky became more and more cloudy we cancelled our hike half an hour later: Under these conditions, we wouldn't see any rock lizards anyhow.

Next, we visited the Asco valley, another mountain gorge in the North. There, fewer tourists compared to Restonica. Above the Haut-Asco ski station we found rock lizards and Podarcis tiliguerta, again.

Presumably, September is not the optimal time to find amphibians. Hence we decided to start a night-excursion – hoping for salamanders. Possibly, we are not the greatest amphibian hunters... in any case, we didn't succeed. At least we could watch several Tarentola mauritanica on the house walls in a nearby village (where also good pizza was served). This was the end of our mountain stay. The next morning we moved to the south-west coast at Propriano.



The famous Restonica valley...



hiking destination for crowds of tourists...



Freezing Podarcis tiliguerta



Another endemic plant of Corsica: Narthecium reverchonii



Haut-Asco mountain scenery...



...home of Podarcis tiliguerta...



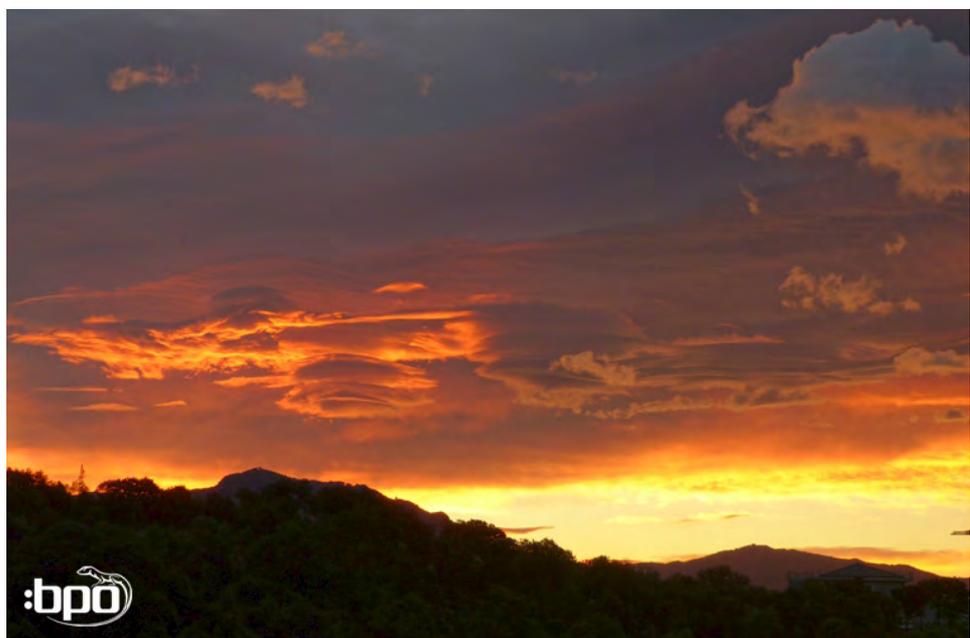
...and this Archaeolacerta bedriagae with decorative blue dots



Dinner on the balcony of our Grand-Hotel in Corte



Result of a rather fruitless night excursion: Tarentola mauritanica – presumably, the picture quality could have been increased by activation of the red-eye reduction function...



Good morning, Corsica! – Let's go south.

Whereas *Archeolacerta bedriagae* seems to be almost omnipresent in the high altitudes of Haut Corse, only a few populations at the coast are known. At first, we followed a hint given by Jeroen – a place at the south coast near Bonifacio. Here, after a long search, we found a sub-adult and an adult specimen at exactly the rock formation Jeroen had described. In the nearby area we didn't come across a single rock lizard despite there were plenty of suitable habitats. Should the rock lizards be so rare at the coast?

Later on, a stopover near Bonifacio brought *Podarcis siculus* which seems to be much rarer than *Podarcis tiliguerta* on Corsica. In the evening we had plenty of *Tarentola mauritanica* and *Hemidactylus turcicus* around our apartment.



The coast at Bonifacio – in the background Sardinia can vaguely be seen.



Subadult *Archeolacerta bedriagae*...



...and an adult



At the south coast, Podarcis tiliguerta is more colourful than in the mountains



Another curious Podarcis tiliguerta



Podarcis siculus at an olive tree



Podarcis siculus is substantially bigger and more robust than Podarcis tiliguerta



Orthetrum brunneum(?) in love



Female *Calopteryx haemorrhoidalis*...



...and some males



Hemidactylus turcicus in the torch light

We checked another coastal section near Propriano and – to our surprise – we found a spot directly at the sea which was densely populated by *Archaeolacerta bedriagae*. These “sea lizards” were really impressive: very dark, frowning animals with stoic behavior: When they feel disturbed, they slowly walk away – actually they don’t run –, disappear and don’t come back. Completely different as the bustling and curious wall lizards.



Lizard habitat with sea view



...and its inhabitant (*Archaeolacerta bedriagae*)



This *Archaeolacerta bedriagae* lives up to its genus name...



A mini dragon...



...in full glory



Sea-lizard



The coastal specimen frequently showed blue colours on their tails.



A juvenile



And a more colourful specimen



All observations have to be documented accurately...

The Propriano area has coastal rocks as well as sandy beaches with dunes and marsh areas. Here, we searched for *Natrix natrix corsa*. Soon, we found one and even came across a nice *Hierophis viridiflavus* which tolerated being photographed in-situ. *Hierophis viridiflavus* seems to be common in this area – we saw several juveniles. Our search for *Euleptes europea* turned out to be more difficult. As we finally had found a juvenile and tried to get some pictures, this specimen lost its tale. We cannot recommend handling these fragile animals. After this experience we decided to cancel our search for *Euleptes*.



Dune vegetation: *Glaucium flavum*



Hierophis viridiflavus, sun-basking



Natrix natrix corsa



Juvenile *Euleptes europaea*



Juvenile *Hierophis viridiflavus*



Pancratium maritimum

We visited another rocky coastal section at the south-west coast and discovered that the complete area was densely populated by *Archaeolacerta bedriagae*. Obviously, this species may be more abundant at the coast as it seems. Presumably, the time of the day and weather conditions play a role if the lizards come out: an apparently uninhabited area can be full of rocks lizards some hours later and vice-versa. We don't know which factors determine if they appear or not.



Searching for rock lizards (1)



Searching for rock lizards (2)



Archaeolacerta bedriagae...



...and another one



Coastal habitat



A subadult specimen...



...and a juvenile

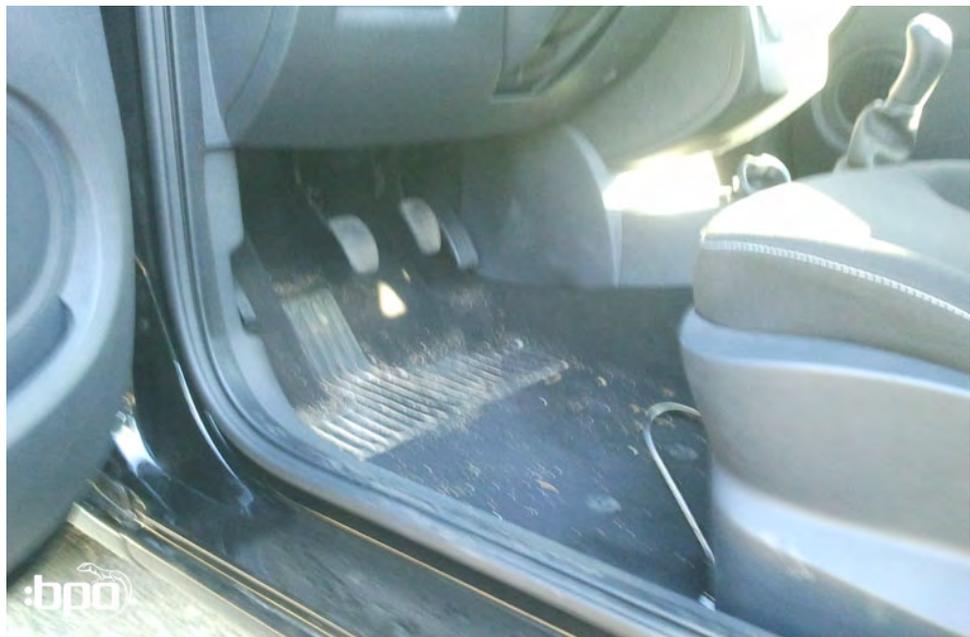


Another nice juvenile



Having enough of the photographers...

This photo session was the end of our Corsica stay. In the morning of 16 September we went to Bastia airport. There, we had some fun with the friendly staff of the local car rental company (see below) and finally we left to Nice there we stayed for another night. After having explored the herpetological and commercial attractions of this city we took the plane back to Düsseldorf the next day.



Fieldherpers beware! On Corsica, the rentals cars have to be returned clean – that means: vacuum cleaned. If there is some dirt on the floor – like on this picture – it will cost 135 Euros. A great business model!



Au revoir, Corse



Nice:



Finally – shopping!



Herpetofauna Niceae: Tarentola mauritanica...



...and Podarcis muralis



Homo sapiens