

A new record of Schneider's Skink, *Eumeces schneideri* Daudin, 1802 (Sauria: Scincidae) from Cyprus

by Bayram Göçmen, Asaf Senol and Ahmet Mermer

Abstract. This is the first report on the presence of *Eumeces schneideri* in northern Cyprus and is the second actual report from Cyprus. One specimen was collected and is described. The Cypriot population of *Eumeces schneideri* looks quite homogeneous: it has a dorsal pattern with weakly developed orange dots or without orange dots in adult specimens as in the new specimen and also, the darkened flanks, the two dorsolateral light bands and the presence of the few scattered small orange spots on the hind legs lead us to conclude that the Cypriot population is not identifiable with the known subspecies from the Levant countries. Thus, we accept that the sub-specific status of our specimen is *Eumeces schneideri* ssp.

Kurzfassung. Dies ist die erste Meldung des Tüpfelskinks, *Eumeces schneideri*, für das nördliche Zypern, und der zweite Nachweis für die Insel überhaupt. Ein Exemplar wurde gesammelt und wird beschrieben. Die zypriotische Population von *E. schneideri* scheint ziemlich homogen zu sein: Adulttiere haben ein dorsales Zeichnungsmuster mit schwach entwickelten oder – wie bei dem neuen Exemplar – fehlenden orangenen Punkten. Dunkle Flanken, zwei dorsolaterale helle Streifen und das Vorhandensein einiger kleiner, verstreuter orangefarbener Punkte auf den Hinterextremitäten führen uns zu dem Schluß, dass die zypriotische Population nicht mit den bekannten Unterarten aus den Levantländern identisch ist. Wir betrachten daher das von uns untersuchte Exemplar als *Eumeces schneideri* ssp.

Key words. Taxonomy, subspecies, Levantine countries, Cyprus, Middle East.

Introduction

The distribution of the skink *Eumeces schneideri* Daudin, 1802 extends from North Africa over Sinai, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Anatolia and Cyprus to West and Central Asia with a vertical distribution to 1800 m. In the Levant countries including Egypt, the species comprises three subspecies: *E. schneideri schneideri* Daudin, 1802, *E. schneideri pavimentatus* Geoffroy-St. Hilaire, 1827, and *E. schneideri princeps* Eichwald, 1839 (EISELT 1940, MERTENS 1946, WERNER 1971). It inhabits bushy open places with rocky substrates and gardens, and hides under stones, in holes and in burrows dug by itself or other burrowing animals (BARAN 1977, OSENEGG 1989). In Cyprus it has previously been reported only from two areas, namely from the Platraes-Troodos Mountains and from Ayia Marina in the Paphos District (WERNER 1936, EISELT 1940, MERTENS 1946, CLARK 1973, OSENEGG 1989, SCHÄTTI & SIGG 1989). Since no voucher material is available from previous reports (SCHÄTTI & SIGG 1989, GÖÇMEN et al. 1996) except from that of OSENEGG (1989), the species was considered to be threatened with extinction on the island (GÖÇMEN et al. 1996). Since so little information is available on this rare Cypriot skink, a recent record is briefly presented here.

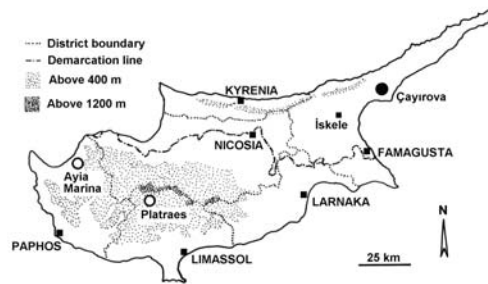


Fig. 1. Map showing the new (black circle) and previous localities (open circles) at which specimens were collected from Cyprus.

Description of the specimen

A male was collected at Çayırova Köyü near Iskele (about 21 km air distance to its north-east) in the Karpas District, northern Cyprus, 35°20'N, 34°02'E (Fig. 1), on 5.5.1999 by A. SENOL, A. MERMER, and B. GÖÇMEN. The specimen is deposited in Ege University, ZDEU 10/1999.

The specimen (see Figs. 2 & 3) is an adult male with a broken tail. Snout-vent length (SVL) 163 mm, tail length (TL) 252 mm, head length 30.5 mm, head width 17.8, pileus length 28.8 mm, pileus width 13.8 mm, fore limb length 34.5 mm, hind limb length 49.7 mm, the length of the fourth toe of the hind limb 16.5 mm. Pholidosis (L/R): supraoculars 6/6; supraciliaries 6/4; supralabials 8/8; auriculars 4/4; nuchals 1/1; nasals 2/2; postmentalia 2/2; frontonasale in contact with 2 supranasals; prefrontal plates in touch at a very small point with each other; preoculars between eye and nasal 2/2; supraoculars in contact with 2 (1/1) prefrontals in their anterolaterals with 1 median frontale, with 2 (1/1) frontoparietals and also with 2 (1/1) parietals in their posterolaterals; interparietal single; subdigital lamellae under the fourth toes of the hind limbs 15/15; scales around middle of body 26; dorsal scales from occipit (parietalia) to above cloaca 66.

Colour in life (Figs. 2–3) dark brown grey. Dorsolaterally a pair of relatively distinct, light supratemporal band, one scale wide, extend from the level of the fore limbs to above cloaca. Laterally, a dark orange lateral band, one scale wide, extends from below the eye along the flank to the groin. Back without white dots or orange spots, while a few scattered small orange spots occur on the dorsal side of the hind legs. Flank between the orange band and the light dorsolateral band (= temporal band) looks relatively darker than mid-dorsum. Below the lateral orange band, as well as the venter, coloured cream, throat and chin whitish.

The specimen was found approximately at sea level and near the coastal stripe under a large stone on sandy ground (Figs. 2–3). The vegetation climax comprised a few carob trees (*Ceratonia siliqua*) and an olive tree (*Olea europaea*) near the collecting place.

Discussion

The new specimen almost agrees in pholidosis and colouration, except of the dorsal side of the body, with all the descriptions of the known subspecies: *E. schneideri schneideri* Daudin, 1802, *E. schneideri pavimentatus* Geoffroy-St. Hilaire, 1827 and *E. schneideri princeps* Eichwald, 1839 (EISELT 1940, MERTENS 1946, WERNER 1971) which are distrib-

Fig. 2. Dorso-lateral view of the new specimen of *Eumeces schneideri* from Cyprus (photograph by Asaf SENOL).

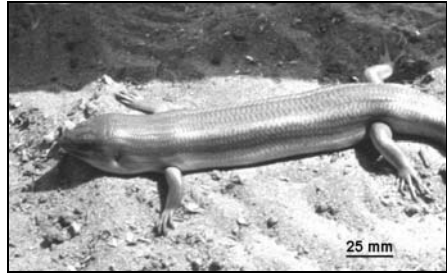


Fig. 3. Dorsal view of the new specimen of *Eumeces schneideri* from Cyprus (photograph by Bayram GÖÇMEN).



uted in the Levant countries including Egypt. In the previous reports on the Cypriot specimens (EISELT 1940, MERTENS 1946, OSENEGG 1989) there are general agreement that the Cypriot population has a dorsal pattern with weakly developed orange dots or without orange dots in adult specimens, as in the new specimen. On the other hand, similar colours were reported as aberrations for the other known subspecies of the species: *E. schneideri pavimentatus* (Baran, 1977) and *E. schneideri princeps* from Anatolia and Jordan (WERNER 1971, BARAN 1977). In both the new specimen and the other recent voucher specimen from Paphos (southern Cyprus) collected by Hanjörg WIEDL (ZFMK 48741, OSENEGG 1989), the scale counts around the middle of the body (26 in our specimen and 24 in OSENEGG'S specimen) agree equally with those of *pavimentatus* (22-26), *schneideri* (24-26) and *princeps* (26-28) reported from the mainland localities of the species (EISELT 1940, MERTENS 1946, WERNER 1971, BARAN 1977). Both Cypriot specimens are distinctly different from all three known subspecies mentioned above by having a dorsal pattern without orange nor yellow spots.

EISELT (1940) stated that the *pavimentatus* subspecies exists in Cyprus. However, WERNER (1946) considered the Cypriot population as belonging to the nominate race. OSENEGG (1989) found that the Cypriot population of *E. schneideri* seems to be only weakly differentiated from *pavimentatus* from the opposite mainland in Turkey and Syria (see also BÖHME & WIEDL 1994). However, this situation also seems to apply to *princeps* and *schneideri*, since the same scale counts around middle of body are also seen in these two later subspecies. The dark brown-grey coloured dorsum with no orange spots, and also the darkened flanks, the two dorsolateral light bands and the presence of a few scattered small orange spots on the hind legs, may be used for describing a new subspecies from the island. However, further material is required to show whether these characters are typical for the Cypriot

population, and we thus accept provisionally the subspecific status of our specimen as *E. schneideri* ssp.

On the other hand, the new specimen of *Eumeces schneideri* seems to be adapted to semi-arid conditions with weakly developed vegetation contrary to the previous reports from the island (WERNER 1936, CLARK 1970, OSENEGG 1989). This suggests that the species could be found almost everywhere on the island.

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