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**THE PRESENCE OF GEKKONIDAE (REPTILIA: SQUAMATA) ON FUNGUS ROCK AND FILFLA (MALTESE ARCHIPELAGO)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The presence of *Hemidactylus turcicus* (L.) on Fungus Rock is recorded for the first time, while its presence on Filfla is confirmed. Other specimens were observed on Filfla and one was tentatively identified as *Tarentola mauritanica* (L.).

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**INTRODUCTION**

Two species of gecko, the Moorish Gecko, *Tarentola mauritanica* (L.) and the Turkish Gecko, *Hemidactylus turcicus* (L.), are found in the Maltese Islands, and are quite widespread (Despott 1913, 1915, Lanfranco 1955, Mertens 1968, Lanza 1973, Böhme 1981, Savona Ventura 1983a, 1983b, Lanfranco & Schembri 1989, Baldacchino & Schembri 1993, Baldacchino 1996, & pers. obs.). Savona Ventura (1983b) states that *Hemidactylus turcicus* appears to be very widespread in the Maltese Islands, being recorded from all islands and islets except General's Rock (Fungus Rock) at Dwejra, Gozo.

**RECORDS FROM FUNGUS ROCK**

On the 26th May 2000 we visited Fungus Rock primarily to collect data on the shearwaters (*Calonectris diomedea* and *Puffinus yelkouan*) breeding on the islet, as well as on the endemic race of the Maltese Wall Lizard *Podarcis filfolensis generalensis* and the parasitic plant of historical interest *Cynomorium coccineum*. While on the rock we discovered a small specimen of *Hemidactylus turcicus* hiding under a small boulder. We identified the species as it had claws on its five toes, while the adhesive pads did not extend to the toe-tips. The overall length of the specimen (from the tip of the head to the tip of the tail) was 70mm, while the length from the tip of the head to the cloaca was 34mm. This would appear to be the first record of this species on the islet.

**RECORDS FROM FILFLA**

Despott (1917) was the first to confirm the presence of Gekkonidae on Filfla. He states that two years earlier, during one of his "excursions" to the islet he "caught a glimpse of a member of the Gecko's family" which he could not "ascribe to any of the two species met with in Malta, but which might be the *Phyllodactylus europeus* which according to Giglioli is to be found here". The latter statement was taken from Gulia (1914) who had declared at the 9<sup>th</sup> International Zoological Congress in March 1913, that he could not confirm what E. Giglioli had suggested to him, viz. that *Phyllodactylus europeus* should occur in the Maltese Islands. On a visit to Filfla, Mertens (1968) examined two specimens which he identified as the nominate race of the Moorish Gecko *Tarentola m. mauritanica*. Savona Ventura (1983a) mentions that both *Tarentola mauritanica mauritanica* and *Hemidactylus turcicus turcicus* are found on Filfla but he gave no details or records.

Since 1968 we have been visiting Filfla up to five times a year, mainly to monitor the population of seabirds breeding there. We have seen specimens of Gekkonidae on at least four occasions. One specimen, which was not identified as it could not be examined closely, was noted amongst the boulders beneath the cliffs on the night of 6-7th June 1992. Another, which was seen in a very narrow crevice on the plateau surface during daytime on 23rd May 1995, probably belonged to *T. mauritanica* as we had the

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impression that it had claws on only two of its toes. Following this, two other specimens, which were examined in the hand on 19th May 1997 (during daytime on the plateau surface), and on 5th August 1999 (at night beneath the cliffs) respectively, were definitely identified as *H. turcicus*. Two other gecko specimens, which could not be examined, were also seen in crevices beneath the cliffs on the latter date.

It is interesting to note that all the specimens we have seen on the two islets were always of approximately the same small size as the one measured on Fungus Rock. We could not ascertain whether the specimens we have seen were those of juvenile geckos or of small adults whose size was conditioned by the particular small-islet environment.

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