

THE FIRST RECORD OF *ABLEPHARUS KITAIBELII* (BIBRON AND BORY DE SAINT-VINCENT, 1833) IN THE NORTH OF OLT COUNTY

Conete Maria Denisa^{1*}

¹ Faculty of Science, Physical Education and Informatics, The National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, Pitești University Centre, Romania



Abstract

The lizards of the fam. Scincidae are represented by a single species over most of South East Europe. The Snake-eyed Skink is one of the smallest lizards in Europe with a relatively secretive lifestyle.

Regarding the distribution of this species, the Snake-eyed Skink - *Ablepharus kitaibelii* (Bibron & Bory de Saint-Vincent, 1833) has not been reported so far in the north of Olt County. It is the first recording in this area. This research indicates for the first time two populations of *Ablepharus kitaibelii* situated in the commune of Bărăști, in an area where the species was not previously documented. This commune is located in the north of Olt county, 50 km away from the municipality of Slatina, county residence. Bărăști commune is situated in the hilly region with an altitude of up to 318 m, part of the territory between the Cotmeana and Vedea rivers, known as the Cotmeana Platform, on the line Drăgășani-Spineni-Mârghia-Pitești, which makes the transition between hill and plain. The Snake-eyed Skink is considered threatened in Romania. This rare species with a restricted and fragmented distribution is present in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive, the local protection of this species being necessary through special conservation measures, such as: stopping deforestation, stopping the expansion of agricultural or residential areas in the researched area, controlling intensive grazing (there being several sheep and goat pens in the area), replacement of False Acacia and Pine plantations with Oak, supervision of stray cats and dogs, etc.

Keywords: *Ablepharus kitaibelii*, distribution, new localities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The lizards of the fam. **Scincidae** are represented by a single species over most of South East Europe (Figure 1, <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/29691/115767606>). The Snake-eyed Skink is one of the smallest lizards in Europe with a relatively secretive lifestyle, being very difficult to observe (Sillero et al. 2014; Vergilov et al., 2016; Vergilov et al., 2022).

In Romania, *Ablepharus kitaibelii* (Bibron & Bory de Saint-Vincent, 1833) is a rare species (considered threatened), being present mainly in the southern regions of the country. The distribution range of the species in our country seems to be disjunctive, being found in Oltenia (in the southwest of Oltenia), the center of Walachia (Bucharest area), Dobrogea, the south of Banat (Danube Gorge), etc. (Fuhn and Vancea, 1961; Iftime, 2005; Cogălniceanu et al., 2013).



Figure 1. Overall distribution of *A. kitaibelii* of South East Europe (Vergilov et al., 2016)

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ablepharus kitaibelii is mentioned in the following international legal instruments and agreements: EU Habitats Directive (Annex IV) and Bern Convention (Annex II) (Török et al., 2013; <https://eunis.eea.europa.eu/species/628>). The research was carried out in the spring and late summer of 2023 and 2024. In the summer of 2024 (3.08.2024) the photo of the species was sent and the observation was uploaded to the Ornitodata Herpetofauna Application.

Regarding the distribution of this species, the Snake-eyed Skink has not been reported so far in the north of Olt County (Figure1, Figure 2). Bărăști commune is located in the north of Olt county, 50 km away from the municipality of Slatina, county residence. This commune is situated in the hilly region with an altitude of up to 318 m, part of the territory between the Cotmeana and Vedeia rivers, known as the Cotmeana Platform, on the line Drăgășani-Spineni-Mârghia-Pitești, which makes the transition between hill and plain. Bărăști commune borders to the North-East with Vedeia commune, Argeș county, to the East with Mârghia village, from Lunca Corbului commune, which is administratively part of Argeș county territory (<https://influx.primariabarastiolt.ro/api/v1/web/get-file/ro/content/primaria-barasti/primaria/hotarari/hotarari-din-2015/anexa-la-hcl-43>). The habitat in the area of the two localities in Bărăști commune is represented by agricultural land, partly abandoned, places vacant, fallows land, grassland, pasture meadows, with forest curtains of mixed deciduous trees (*Quercus sp.*, *Fraxinus sp.*) and coniferous forest (*Pinus sp.*) planted, acacia curtains, vegetable gardens, orchards, etc. The area is known because storks nest in the ash trees (*Fraxinus sp.*) in the research area (Conete, 2021).

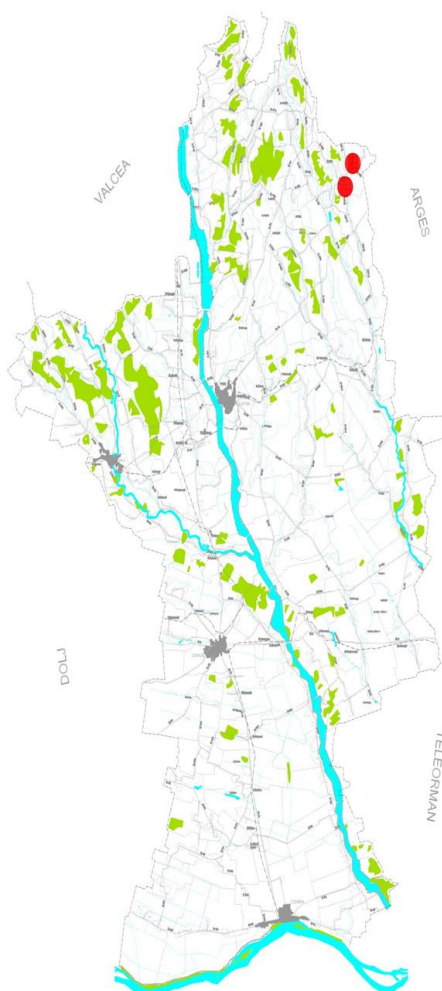


Figure 2. *Ablepharus kitaibelii* localities in the north of Olt County (new records in Bărăști commune)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The present work indicates for the first time two populations of *Ablepharus kitaibelii* situated in the commune of Bărăști (near the Vedeți river), in an area where the species was not previously documented. It is the first recording in the north of Olt county, in village Ciocănești, on 3.08.2024 (the observation and photos of the species with geographical coordinates have been uploaded to the Ornitodata Herpetofauna application), then in August and September the species was observed (two adult specimens and two juveniles) in the village of Bărăștii de Vede. The two villages (Bărăștii de Vede and Ciocănești) from Bărăști commune are neighboring. The species (Figure 3) probably expanded their area through local practices of transporting manure from one household to another.

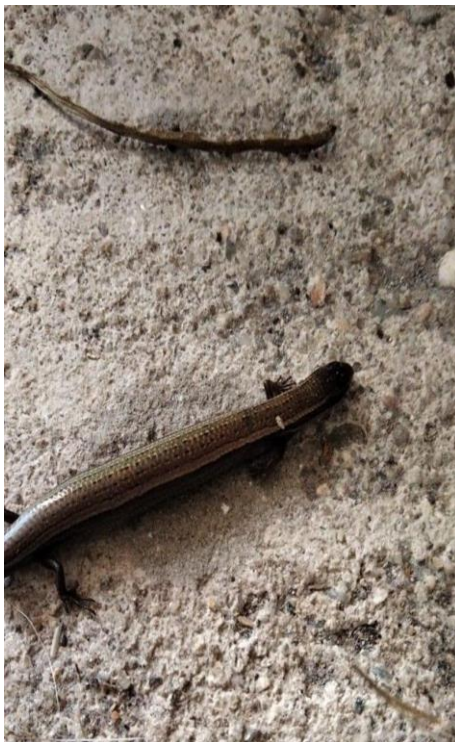


Figure 3. *Ablepharus kitaibelii* (original photo)

This rare species with a restricted and fragmented distribution is present in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive and the local protection of this species being necessary through special conservation measures, such as: stopping deforestation, stopping the expansion of agricultural or residential areas in the researched area, controlling intensive grazing (there being several sheep and goat pens in the area), replacement of False Acacia and Pine plantations with Oak, supervision of stray cats and dogs, etc.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Ablepharus kitaibelii has expanded its area to the north of Olt county (despite the cutting of oak forests, ash forest curtains and their replacement with False Acacia), being observed in two neighboring villages, inside the localities, in areas with unmown grass, where grazing is not practiced much.

It is necessary to respect the conservation measures of the species and its habitat.

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