



Short Note

A new record of *Telescopus fallax* (Fleischmann, 1831) (Squamata: Colubridae) near the border between Bulgaria and Greece in the Rhodope Mountains, Xanthi Regional Unit

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Abstract. This study presents a new record of the European Cat Snake (*Telescopus fallax*), based on a deceased juvenile specimen from the Western Rhodopes in the Xanthi Regional Unit, Greece, 2.4 km away from the border with Bulgaria. The record fills a gap within the known range of the species and raises the question of its distribution in the neighboring parts of Bulgaria, where known records are extremely limited.

Keywords: European Cat Snake, Mediterranean Cat Snake, Northern Greece, Western Rhodopes

Introduction

The Xanthi Regional Unit is a part of the Eastern Macedonia and Thrace administrative region located in North-Eastern Greece and has a total area of 1,793 km². About 54% of its territory is occupied by forests, followed by cultivated and fallow land (32%), pastures (7.5%) and areas under water (4%) (IMSI, 1999–2000). Furthermore, the area includes some of the southernmost parts of the Western Rhodopes, which have a unique Continental-Mediterranean climate and biodiversity (Stefanov, 2006). It borders the Aegean Sea to the south and the Bulgarian provinces of Smolyan and Kardzhali to the north. To the west lies the regional unit of Kavala, to the northwest - that of Drama and to the east - that of Rodopi.

The European Cat Snake *Telescopus fallax* (Fleischmann, 1831) is a secretive and almost completely crepuscular and

nocturnal species. It inhabits warm stony areas such as degraded or rocky deciduous woodlands, slopes, old walls, ruins and orchards, sometimes near human settlements. (Arnold & Ovenden, 2004; Speybroeck *et al.*, 2018). In the Balkans, it occurs mainly along the Mediterranean coast, as well as the Greek mainland and most of the Aegean and Ionian Islands. Its range in Bulgaria is limited, consisting of the valleys of the Struma and Arda Rivers (Beshkov & Nanev, 2002; Naumov, 2007).

Despite the relatively wide distribution, its detection has largely remained difficult, likely due to its nighttime activity and the scarcity of research, focused specifically on it (Domozetski *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, each report can be of great value for understanding its biological and ecological characteristics.

Material and methods

On the 24th of August 2025 at 17:57 h, a deceased juvenile snake was found at the immediate vicinity of the Iamatikes Piges settlement, on the pathway to the hot springs located there (41.3477 °N, 25.0132 °E; elevation 400 m), just 2.4 km south-southeast from the border with Bulgaria (Smolyan province) - Fig.1. The specimen, measured approximately 23 cm in total length, was being actively moved by ants (*Cataglyphis* sp.) which initially brought attention to it - Fig. 2. It was identified *in situ* as *T. fallax* by the dorsal spots, the head shape and the vertical eye slits (Naumov, 2007). The occurring habitat corresponded to 91AA of the EUNIS Habitat Classification – white-oak forests, dominated by *Quercus pubescens* Willd on stony places with a varying rock type foundation (Kavrakova *et al.*, 2009). Due to the immediate proximity of the urban territory, the terrain was under strong anthropogenic pressure.

Results and Discussion

The specimen was rather preserved and did not show signs of predation. The only visible damage was a small crushed spot in the upper body area. Possible causes of death could be a human intervention or the result of an attack from a domestic cat which are known to sometimes kill prey, including snakes, without feeding on it (Cecchetti *et al.*, 2021).

Publications throughout the years have given some knowledge on the extension of this species in North-Eastern Greece (Fig. 1.): Southern Evros area (Helmer & Sholte, 1985); Central Xanthi area - about 23.4 km to the south of the presented data and the closest to it (Chondropoulos, 1989); Southern (Cattaneo & Cattaneo, 2014) and North-Eastern (Christopoulos, 2022) Rodopi area. Yet, on the Bulgarian side of the Rhodope Mountains, the data about its distribution is exceptionally scarce with

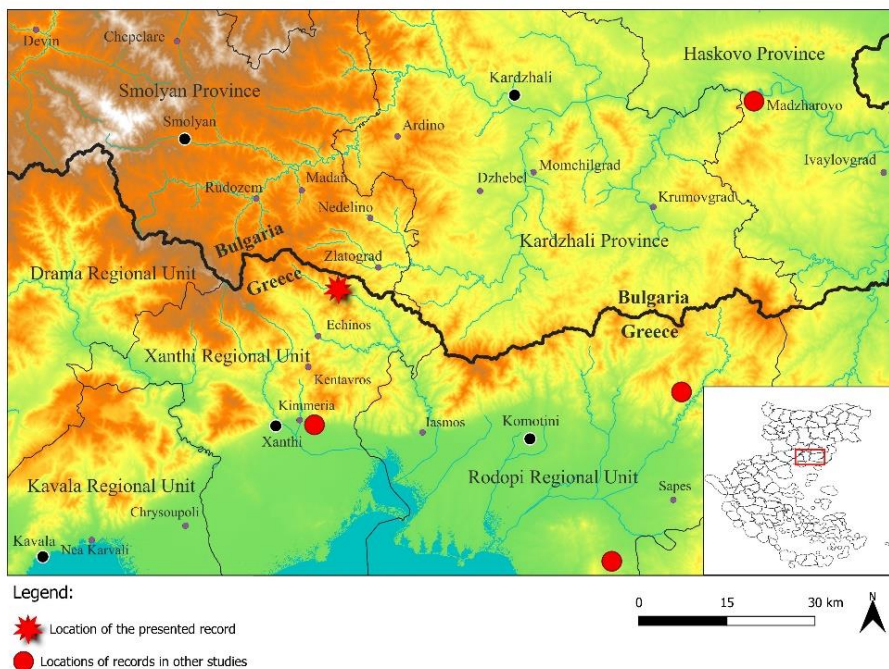


Fig. 1. Map of the presented and other reported records of *Telescopus fallax* in the Xanthi Regional Unit and the neighboring provinces in Greece and Bulgaria (map created with QGIS v.3.40.11 (QGIS.org, 2025)).

just one published record from the Eastern Rhodopes - Madzharovo, Haskovo Province (Petrov *et al.*, 2002) - about 77 km away to the northeast from the presented record. Additionally, all of these localities, except for the Southern Evros and North-Eastern Rodopi areas, have been further invigorated by community observations within the iNaturalist network from the last few years (iNaturalist, 2025).

Similarly to other reports on new herpetofauna records (Georgiev & Mollov, 2016; Christopoulos, 2022; Georgiev, 2025), the presented data fills a gap in the distribution of the species, even though it falls within its expected

range. Additionally, the close distance to the Smolyan Province of Bulgaria, from which there are no known records of *T. fallax*, raises the question about its potential presence there. While most distribution maps portray this part of the border between the two countries as the limit of this snake's extension, it should always be taken into consideration that species and ecosystems rarely follow the political boundaries which humans draw on maps (Speybroeck *et al.*, 2018). For these reasons, this report is of great interest to herpetology and may serve as the pavement for further studies in the area, where missing links between the populations of this species in the two countries clearly exist.



Fig. 2. Dorsal (left) and ventral (right) view of the deceased juvenile *Telescopus fallax*, found in the Xanthi Regional Unit.

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