

FIRST RECORD OF *TESTUDO MARGINATA* (CHELONIA: TESTUDINIDAE) FROM THE ISLAND OF SAMOS, GREECE (EASTERN AEGEAN)

Elias Tzoras¹, Alexis Panagiotopoulos², Seryios Papaioannou³

¹ Patra, 264 42 Achaia, Greece, e-mail: eliaztzoras@outlook.com

² School of Biology, University of Patras, 265 00 Patra, Greece

³ Neoi Epivates, 570 19, Thessaloniki, Greece

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Three native species of terrestrial chelonians are distributed in Greece, while only one constitutes a Balkan endemic with a limited distribution range across southern Albania and continental Greece, that is, the Marginated Tortoise, *Testudo marginata* Schoepff, 1792 (Speybroeck et al. 2016). The Marginated Tortoise is the largest European tortoise, reaching a maximum carapace length up to 380 mm (Bringsøe et al. 2001). It is a widespread species in Greece, occurring in the largest part of the mainland (excluding the northeastern part of the country), as well as on a great number of islands and islets; namely those of Skyros, Valaxa, Kyra Panagia, Salamina, Spetses, Dokos, Poros, Psili, Spetsopoula, Romvi, Skiathos, Sapientza, Sfaktiria, Euboia, Elafonisos and Trizonia (Watson 1962, Gruber & Fuchs 1977, Kock & Storch 1979, Bringsøe 1985, Clark 1989, Cattaneo 1997, Chondropoulos & Chiras 1997, Bringsøe et al. 2001, Broggi 2016a, Tzoras et al. 2019). Due to the fact that locals often capture tortoises and keep them as pets, the species has been also introduced in areas outside of its native range, e.g. in many Greek islands, in Turkey, Calabria, Sardinia and Cyprus (Brinckmeier et al. 1989, Bringsøe et al. 2001, Sperone et al. 2010, Baier et al. 2013). In this short communication we document and report the first record of *T. marginata* on the island of Samos, Greece.

Samos is located in the Eastern Aegean, covering a surface of 476 km². The island is characterized by pine forests, dry fields and extensive olive orchards, as well as wetlands at the southeastern coastline. Reptile fauna of Samos is one of the richest amongst Greek islands (N=28) and it's mostly of Asia Minor origin (Ioannides et al. 1994, Speybroeck et al. 2014).

On 30 October 2020, during a herpetological expedition on Samos, we spotted a single juvenile individual of *T. marginata* hiding under a stone, in a sparsely populated area between the villages of Rizovrachos and Mesokambos (37.7182°N, 26.9413°E, WGS 85; Fig. 1). The tortoise was found in an Olive grove habitat crossed by dry stone-walls and demarcated by vegetated hills to the north and a dry stream with riparian vegetation to the south. Except for a juvenile *Testudo graeca*, no other tortoises were found in that locality after a 2-day thorough investigation of an approximate area of 1.5 km².

Testudo marginata new for Samos



Fig. 1. **A.** *Testudo marginata*, 30 October 2020, Samos. **B.** same specimen, view of plastron.

The island of Samos has been thoroughly surveyed the latest years, regarding its herpetofauna (e.g. Ioannides et al. 1994, Clark 2000, Speybroeck et al. 2014, Cattaneo 2019). Since no sightings of Margined Tortoises have been reported in the hitherto literature, we hypothesize that this record might be related to a recent introduction event. Similar cases of introduced individuals that were illegally kept/transferred as pets and escaped, or even introduced established populations of *T. marginata* on Greek islands, have been repeatedly documented in literature, i.e. for the islands of Paros, Milos, Chios, Cephalonia, Lesvos, Corfu, Amorgos, Andros, Naxos, Syros, Alonissos, Kythera and Lefkada (Clark 1970, Cattaneo 1984, Dimitropoulos 1987, Keymar & Weissinger 1987, Tsunis & Dimitropoulos 1994, Bringsøe et al. 2001, Broggi 2007, 2010, 2016b, Sindaco & Rossi 2020). To date, the only introduced chelonian species reported from the island of Samos is the Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*), recorded in a single locality at the southeast of the island (Speybroeck et al. 2014). Our finding urges a subsequent comprehensive investigation in order to clarify whether this sighting corresponds to a single, isolated case of translocation, or to the presence of an established, reproducing population of *T. marginata* that has been introduced on the island of Samos.

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