



INTRODUCED SPECIES

An Unexpected Record of the Mediterranean Spur-thighed Tortoise *Testudo graeca* on Kastellorizo Island, Dodecanese, Greece

Alexios Panagiotopoulos¹, Michail Manonas², and Elias Tzoras³

¹Department of Biology, University of Patras, Panepistimioupoli Rio, GR 26500, Patras, Greece (alexispan556677@gmail.com)

²Neo Iraklio, 141 22 Attica, Greece

³Patras, 264 42 Achaia, Greece

Kastellorizo, in the Dodecanese Island group of the southeastern Aegean Sea, is the easternmost Greek island. It lies about 125 km east of Rhodes Island and approximately 2 km off the southwestern coast of Turkey. The area of the island is about 9 km² and its highest elevation is 273 m. Principal habitats are dense Mediterranean shrubland and phrygana (or garrigue), which grows primarily in rocky terrain. The only settlement surrounds the port at the northeastern edge of the island, whereas the municipal airport is inland. Cultivated land is restricted to a few small patches. The documented herpetofauna of Kastellorizo comprises 17 species, two amphibians (*Lycciasalamandra luschani*, *Bufotes viridis*), seven lizards (*Ablepharus budaki*, *Anatololacerta pelasgiana*, *Hemidactylus turcicus*, *Heremites auratus*, *Laudakia stellio*, *Mediodactylus danilewskii*, *Ophiomorus kardesi*), one amphisbaenian (*Blanus strauchi*), and seven snakes (*Dolichophis jugularis*, *Eirenis modestus*, *Hemorrhois nummifer*, *Malpolon insignitus*, *Platycephalus najadum*, *Telescopus fallax*, *Xerotyphlops vermicularis*) (Valakos and Papapanagiotou 1985; Paysant 1999, 2005; Kalaentzis et al. 2018).

During a short expedition on Kastellorizo Island on 21 April 2024, we encountered an adult male Mediterranean Spur-thighed Tortoise (*Testudo graeca*) (Fig. 1) relatively close to the settlement in the eastern part of the island (36.144, 29.594; WGS 84) basking in a small, sparsely vegetated meadow with a few olive trees and short bushes (Fig. 2). After taking photographs, it was released at the point of capture. We searched much of the area during the following days but found no additional signs of the species in the valley. A photograph was deposited in the University of Kansas Digital Archive (KUDA 14634) and the identity of the species was confirmed by Oğuz Türkozan.

Tortoises, when present in a habitat, are typically easy to detect. The fact that we found only a single individual during our 6-day search under suitable weather conditions, combined with the absence of local knowledge about tortoises on the island and the lack of evidence in earlier surveys (e.g., Valakos and Papapanagiotou 1985; Paysant 1999, 2005; Kalaentzis et al. 2018) makes the existence of a naturally occurring population doubtful. Human-mediated dispersal,



Figure 1. An adult male Mediterranean Spur-thighed Tortoise (*Testudo graeca*) from Kastellorizo Island, Dodecanese, Greece. Photographs by Elias Tzoras.



Figure 2. Habitat where an adult male Mediterranean Spur-thighed Tortoise (*Testudo graeca*) was encountered on Kastellorizo Island, Dodecanese, Greece. Photograph by Elias Tzoras.

especially of native tortoises, has been widely reported in Greece (Tzoras et al. 2022; Escoriza et al. 2023; Türkozan et al. 2023). Also, the nearby Turkish coast is part of the species' natural range (Türkozan et al. 2023). Consequently, the presence of this individual is most likely the result of a recent anthropogenic introduction rather than representative of a fragmented native population that had not been discovered.

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