

Book Review:

FLORIAN DORÉ, MARC CHEYLAN, PIERRE GRILLET. *Le Lézard ocellé - Un géant sur le continent européen*

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The Ocellated lizard, *Timon lepidus* (Daudin, 1802) is found in Portugal, Spain, in southern and western France and in Italy, but only in the north-western part of Liguria, where the populations are in direct continuity with those of Provence (Sindaco and Jeremčenko, 2008; Salvidio et al., 2009; Mateo, 2011). In the last years, this large and attractive lizard has been object of two monographic books, the first published by Cheylan and Grillet (2004) and the second one making the object of this review.

“Le Lézard ocellé - Un géant sur le continent européen” (The Ocellate lizard - A giant on the European continent) is divided in four main sections. The first “Origine et caractéristiques du genre *Timon*” (Origin and characteristics of the genus *Timon*) synthesizes the systematics, taxonomy, evolution and morphology of this large Mediterranean lizards. The approach is a practical naturalistic one, providing information on species variability and also the means to detect the lizard's presence by illustrating its traces and in particular burrows, footprints, feces and shredded skin. The second part “Un hôte des garrigues et maquis méditerranéen” (An inhabitant of Mediterranean garrigue and maquis) gives the detailed and updated situation of the Ocellated lizard populations distribution in different Countries, with particular emphasis on French populations, that have been surveyed by the Authors since many years. The connection between the species and its habitat and microhabitat characteristics is well explained and described by many illustrations of lizards in their natural environment. In this part, the Authors stress the importance of burrows and shelters for the persistence of populations, suggesting a strict connection

with other Mediterranean digging species, such as the rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* and the European bee-eater *Merops apiaster*. The third section “Histoire naturelle du lézard ocellé” (Natural history of the Ocellated lizard) gives detailed information on the trophic niche, seasonal activity pattern, reproductive behavior, individual growth, population structure, displacement and predators.

The last part of this book “Une espèce en déclin” (A declining species) is based on the many scientific reports and publications written in recent years by the Authors on the long-term survey and monitoring of several populations in different regions of France. The examples reported show some striking cases of local decline, sometimes attributable to natural vegetation succession and urbanization, others more enigmatic as is the case of the one from the Crau plain, in which the Ocellated lizard was very abundant about twenty years ago.

It has to be said that since many years, Doré, Cheylan and Grillet proposed and implemented specific survey protocols to assess the temporal trend of Ocellated lizard populations (e.g., Doré et al., 2011). These methods, that account for the species detectability or observability (MacKenzie et al., 2002, 2003), are robust and give sound results, thus permitting to evaluate in an objective way the population trend and, therefore, should be taken as examples when establishing monitoring protocols for other lizards species. Finally in this part of the book, the Authors stress again the importance of artificial burrows and underground man-made shelters for the conservation of Ocellated lizard populations living in open habitats, in which natural rocky shelters are missing or in which tunnel-digging animals are rare or absent. Indeed,

providing artificial shelters could represent a low-cost strategy to locally ameliorate the species conservation status or at least to increase its observability, thus permitting a better assessment of its presence and abundance.

This hard cover book of 192 pages is robustly bound and is illustrated by dozen of really fantastic photos of lizards and their allies in their natural habitat. It is not only extremely informative but is also graphically appealing and full, really full of first-hand informations about the natural history of this fascinating animal, that should be considered as an emblem of non-forested Mediterranean habitats in SW Europe. Since many years, the Authors are giving original contributions on the conservation and ecology of many reptile species in southern Europe and the present book should be of interest not only for herpetologists but also for ecologists and habitat managers dealing with conservation of Mediterranean biodiversity. This book is available from Biotope éditions (<http://www.biotope-editions.com/>) and is priced € 28.00.

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