

The status of the E.S.F. studbook for the Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo hermanni hermanni*)

Introduction

The Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*) is one of the most common kept species of tortoises. It occurs in several southern European countries. Two subspecies are recognized. This studbook deals with the more rare subspecies: *Testudo hermanni hermanni*

This subspecies occurs in southern France, northeastern Spain, northwest, west and southern mainland Italy, Sardinia, Sicily, a few small Italian islands on the west coast, the Balearic Islands and Corsica. (Ballasina, 1995)

This small subspecies rarely grows over 20 cm in length (Ballasina, 1995) but most individuals remain smaller not exceeding 16,5 cm in females and 14 cm in males. (Ernst, Altenburg and Barbour, 2000) This subspecies has a high domed carapax, brightly colored with contrasting areas of yellow and black and usually has a bright yellow spot behind the eye. The plastral markings of this subspecies are characteristically formed of two almost solid dark bands running longitudinally down the plastron. (Ernst, Altenburg and Barbour, 2000). Morphological differences between populations are present especially between the mainland and island populations. (Ballasina, 1995) (Internet 1, 2003)

This subspecies inhabits typical Mediterranean oak forests, dry meadows (macchia), arid scrub hillsides, rocky slopes and margins of farmland. (Ernst, Altenburg and Barbour, 2000)

The survival of this subspecies in the wild is at risk. It is listed as Endangered category B1 en 2 (A-E) in the IUCN red species list. Main threats are fragmentation and loss of habitat due to tourism activities, agriculture and bushfires. Also the introduction of wild boar from Eastern Europe for hunting purposes has a dramatic impact on the survival rate of eggs and hatchlings in Tuscany. (Illegal) over collecting in the past and probably still at present had also caused depletion of many populations especially in southern Italy. A concern is also the introduction of escaped/ released pet tortoises often not belonging to the local form or even subspecies, which can cause pollution of the local genotype.

Several initiatives have been raised in order to preserve this subspecies from extinction by breeding and reintroduction programs. (SOPTOM France, CARAPAX Italy, Son Cifre De Baix Mallorca) The Hermann's tortoise is listed in Appendix 2 of CITES and is protected in all countries of origin by national and regional law.

The situation in captivity is quite variable. In the Netherlands this subspecies is kept in very little numbers. Only a few animals are known to reproduce. In Germany the situation is a bit different as this subspecies is kept and bred more frequently. In Italy where this subspecies is endemic, it is kept and bred in good numbers. Because of the fact that this subspecies has rarely been imported commercially, often founder localities are known as breeders collected their animals themselves. Although this subspecies appears to be a bit more problematic to keep and breed in captivity than the more commonly kept eastern subspecies *Testudo hermanni boettgeri*, keeping and breeding results can be quite good once the animals are well adjusted to their environment.

Actions

Since spring of this year I took over the management of this studbook from Jacco Bruekers. Because of the fact that this studbook was malfunctioning and only three participants were registered, I decided to completely start over again. I want it to become an active studbook with active participation by the participants. So I started an inventory for possible participants. I did this by contacting former registered participants and by writing a small article with a request for participants in the journal of the Dutch turtle society; Trionyx. This article was published in journal nr. 3 of May 2003.

Future actions

One of my goals for this studbook is to make it an international one. In the Netherlands this subspecies is rather scarce. In Germany and Italy there are potential participants with animals that can be of great value for this studbook. For this reason I wrote a small announcement for the Minor.

This is the announcement journal for the German turtle society AG Schiltkröte. This announcement will be published in November 2003.

I am also searching contact with Italian keepers by way of Internet. I will put up an announcement on several herpetological Internet sites.

Because of the fact that many keepers do maintain animals from known localities, these animals will have priority for registration to the studbook, as they are of main value.

It is good to know that many breeders are aware of the fact that there are differences between different populations and that animals of these populations should not be randomly mixed in order to maintain the different genotypes in captivity for future generations.

Another future goal will be to do a research on the (possible) morphological differences between populations. Both in- and ex-situ animals will be examined. Lot of speculation is going on about this topic, but very little scientific articles are published.

Studbook population

This studbook is still in the stage of founding participants. For this reason no animals are already registered. Several keepers reassured me that they are willing to participate to this studbook and therefore registration will start very soon.

I hope next year enough animals will be registered in order to form a good basis for a founder population. I think that it is very important to breed this attractive endangered subspecies in a coordinate way in order to persevere it at least in captivity for future generations.

Literature:

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-Ernst, C.H., & Altenburg, R.G.M. & Barbour, R.W., 2000, *Turtles of the world*, ETI Amsterdam, CD-rom.

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Laurens Woldring

Studbook keeper *Testudo hermanni hermanni*

De La Reijstraat 124

2987 XG Ridderkerk

The Netherlands

E-mail: groovertje@yahoo.com