

Plenary lecture

Living on Mediterranean islets: saurian Crusoes adapt and survive

Panayiotis Pafilis¹

¹Section of Zoology and Marine Biology, Dept. of Biology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Panepistimiopolis, Ilissia 15784, Greece

Minimal masses of land surrounded by sea, Mediterranean islets – small, arid, poor - are the quintessence of insularity. Biodiversity indices are very low and lizards are the top terrestrial predators in most of them. Though diversity is limited, a hidden wealth is patiently waiting to be discovered: the impressive adaptations that these lizards adopted compensate for the scarcity of species. Relaxed predation regime, low food availability and restricted habitat heterogeneity (fewer shelters) shape most parameters of islet life. Dense populations, high intraspecific competition, imaginative resource exploitation, effective thermoregulation and extreme tameness are among the main responses to islet particularities. Here, a panorama of the behavioural, physiological and ecological strategies that lizards living on Mediterranean islets come up with is presented. Rather than a general, global norm, islet lizards seem to follow an idiosyncratic pattern that depends on the particular conditions of each single insular biotope.