

Distribution and conservation status of the European pond turtle in Slovenia

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Abstract: Although the biodiversity in Slovenia is very high, only one turtle species, i.e. the European pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*), has been recorded in the country. In the past, however, it happened to be a very common species in Slovenia. In the past, VALVASOR (1689) reported that it was present all over the country. Particularly large populations inhabited the Ljubljana Moors (Ljubljansko barje) and the SE part of Slovenia (Bela krajina). At the beginning of the 20th century, the species found itself on the very edge of extinction. Between 1960 and 1970, there followed a large input of turtle and tortoise specimens from southern parts of the former Yugoslavia (Macedonia, S Croatia). At that time, several trucks of these animals (*Emys orbicularis*, *Mauremys caspica*, *Testudo graeca*, *Testudo hermanni*), meant for export as pets, were dumped at Ljubljana Moors.

Recent data on the distribution of the European pond turtle are scarce. *Emys orbicularis* lives in all zoogeographical regions of Slovenia (to some, it was introduced), but it is probably rare in all of them. Currently we have no information on its national population size or density, and neither have we sufficient data to even speculate about it. Nothing is also known about the ecology of the species in our country. Formally, the species is protected by law. In spite of the lack of all kinds of data, some Natura 2000 Sites of Community Importance have been proposed in order to protect the species and its habitat.

Key words: *Emys orbicularis*, European pond turtle, conservation, distribution, Slovenia.

Resumen: Distribución y estatus de conservación del galápago europeo en Eslovenia. – Aunque la biodiversidad en Eslovenia es muy alta, sólo una especie de galápago (*Emys orbicularis*) se ha citado en el país. Aunque en el pasado (VALMASOR, 1689) era considerada como una especie muy común, con poblaciones abundantes en Ljubljana Moors (Ljubljansko barje) y el SE de Eslovenia (Bela krajina), al principio del siglo XX las poblaciones se encontraban al borde mismo de la extinción. Entre 1960 y 1970, se produjo una importación masiva de galápagos y tortugas como mascotas (*Emys orbicularis*, *Mauremys caspica*, *Testudo graeca*, *Testudo hermanni*) desde el sur de la antigua Yugoslavia. Aunque los datos recientes sobre la distribución del galápago europeo son escasos, parece que actualmente vive en todas las regiones del país (en algunas ha sido introducido) pero es escaso en todas ellas, sin que exista información fiable sobre los tamaños poblacionales. Formalmente se trata de una especie protegida y la red Natura-2000 ha propuesto LICIS para su conservación y la de sus hábitats.

Palabras clave: conservación, distribución, *Emys orbicularis*, Eslovenia, galápago europeo.

INTRODUCTION

Slovenia is situated in the heart of Europe, where the Alps face the Pannonian plain and the Mediterranean meets the Karst. It covers

20 000 km² and has about two million inhabitants, with its population density figure reaching a little less than 97 inhabitants per km², which is much lower than in the majority of other European countries. More than 50%

