Eastern Montpellier Snake
*Malpolon insignitus* (Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, 1827)

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**Description**

This snake, treated here as valid species (Carranza *et al.*, 2006), presents, as expected, almost identical features with *Malpolon monspessulanus*. In contrast to this, there’re no records of more than 200 cm individuals, the largest individual known is cited by Anderson in Egypt reached 182 cm total length (Baha El Din, 2006).

Head narrow, poorly differentiated from the body and somewhat pointed. Previous supraocular and supranasal areas are somewhat prominent, highlighted by a visible depression in the loreal region. Ophistoglyph. Scale front close. 8 supralabials, the most with the 4th and 5 in contact with the eyes; these are large and with round pupil. Generally 2 postocular and 2 loreal scales. Just 1 preocular with big size, sometimes somewhat fragmented.

Body large, robust, covered with smooth and grooved scales longitudinally more or less obvious; these are arranged in rows 17-19 at midbody. According to Gruber (1993), *M. insignitus* normally has 17 rows, while *M. monspessulanus*
usually has 19; this character is observed in Moroccan individuals (Fahd & Pleguezuelos, 2001; Jiménez-Cazalla obs. pers.). Usually 166-177 ventrals and 93-102 pairs of subcaudal scales. Anal divided.

Males have a uniform dorsal coloration usually greenish, gray-green or brownish. They lack the classic black spot on the anterior body present in *M. monspessulanus* (Mertens, 1925; Lanza & Bruzzone, 1960). Belly white, cream or light yellow, and may present a more or less patent mottled. Juveniles and females with more contrast coloration, showing a pattern of dark spots on lighter background, the ventral coloration is cream or orange, with clear mottled.

**Ecology and habits**

Predominantly terrestrial and diurnal species, but noted an increase in crepuscular and nocturnal activity during the hottest months (Schleich *et al*., 1996; Baha El Din, 2006).

In the region of Oran is active for most of the year, and it has been observed in the months of November and February (Schleich *et al*., 1996).
Unspecified adult individual (Malpolon sp.) without dark spot on the anterior of the body that had 19 rows of dorsal scales. Muluya depression (Morocco). Photo: © Francisco Jimenez-Cazalla.

We didn’t find specific data on reproduction and nutritional spectrum of this taxon in the literature, so the data presented below are those referred by Schleich et al. (1996) to *M. monspessulanus* in northern Africa.

Mating season is in the months from april to june, egg-laying from June to August; the size of this varies from 4-18 eggs. Hatchlings measure between 22-44 cm.

Their food spectrum is quite broad. Juveniles often feed small lizards (*Chalcides, Acanthodactylus*), anfisbaenians (*Blanus, Trogonophis*) and baby mammals. Adults prey on large lizards (*Agama*), snakes (including of the same species), mammals (*Meriones*), lagomorphs and birds (*Alectoris, Galerida*).

It has a great agility of movement and can run at high speed in danger. In case you get cornered it usually it breathes air to produce a loud snort of intimidating character, if it is attacked or subjected not hesitate to bite fiercely. This species isn’t considered dangerous to humans because it doesn’t usually bite with back teeth, the only able teeth to inoculate their weak venom. In most known cases of poisoning were observed only local symptoms such as edema, paresthesia, stiffness of the affected limb and lymphangitis, symptoms that disappear within 48 hours after application of antihistamines and corticosteroids (Pleguezuelos, 1997). Schleich (1987) mentions a fatal case of snake bite in Libya, although he didn’t see directly the event (Schleich et al., 1996; Fahd & Pleguezuelos, 1997).

**Distribution, habitat and abundance in the study area**

Present in the country’s easternmost area, east of the Oued Muluya. Most records are from the highlands region, where it seems to be rare; it’s presence to south decreases as it enters in desert domain (Bons & Geniez, 1996; Fahd & Pleguezuelos, 2001).
Generalist species but their distribution in Morocco is mainly steppe areas, both espart areas (Stipa tenacissima), and other low vegetation cover and variable stoniness.

Bibliography:

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