

A new locality of *Telescopus fallax* (Reptilia: Colubridae) in Bulgaria

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Abstract. A new locality of the European Cat Snake, *Telescopus fallax*, is reported in Bulgaria: the village of Malko Gradishte, Lyubimets Municipality. This locality is situated relatively close to the already known ones, but orographically belongs to the Maritsa River Valley, an area for which the species was previously unknown. An updated distribution map of *T. fallax* in Bulgaria is also presented.

Key words: Cat Snake, distribution, Balkan Peninsula.

Introduction

The European Cat Snake, *Telescopus fallax* (Fleischmann, 1831), is widely distributed across the Middle East – Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Asia Minor, and Transcaucasia. In continental Europe, its distribution is restricted to the Balkan Peninsula (the southern part and Adriatic coast), as well as eastern Ciscaucasia (Ananjeva *et al.* 2006, Sillero *et al.* 2014, Speybroeck *et al.* 2016). It inhabits warm, rocky, or stony areas, such as stone steppes, rocky slopes with maquis or open, deciduous forest, orchards or gardens with dry-stone walls. The species is almost exclusively crepuscular or nocturnal (Speybroeck *et al.* 2016).

Telescopus fallax was recorded in Bulgaria for the first time in 1958 – one dead individual near the village of Vlahi in the Struma River Valley, SW Bulgaria (Beshkov 1959). Until the end of the 20th century, all published localities of this species in Bulgaria referred only to this part of the country (Beschkov 1985, Beschkov & Nanev 2002). The first record of *T. fallax* in the Eastern Rhodopes was reported by Petrov *et al.* (2002), who documented an individual from the Arda River Valley near the town of Madzharovo. Subsequently, Stojanov *et al.* (2011) added two more localities in the same valley, west of Madzharovo. In all later publications concerning *T. fallax* in Bulgaria, any new localities are restricted to the southwestern part of the country (Malakova *et al.* 2018, Domozetski *et al.* 2019, Dyugmedzhiev *et al.* 2019).

Results and Discussion

On 12 August 2026, a freshly killed adult *Telescopus fallax* was found in the yard of a house in the village of Malko Gradishte, Lyubimets Municipality (N41.755° E25.993°, 230 m a.s.l.; Fig. 1: MG12). According to the homeowners (G. Georgieva and A. Georgiev), the snake was brought to the yard by a domestic cat at around 22:30 (GMT + 3) when it showed feeble signs of life but died soon after (Fig. 2A). Another individual (Fig. 2B) was found by V.G. on 19 September 2026 at 21:03 (air temperature = 20°C) in the same locality during an

active search of the village surroundings. This individual was measured (snout–vent length = 50 cm, tail length = 9 cm), photographed, and released at the capture point.

This locality represents the northeasternmost point of the range of *T. fallax* in Bulgaria, and on the Balkan Peninsula (see Sillero *et al.* 2014). It is located relatively close to the already known localities in the Arda River Valley (Fig. 1: LG71, LG81, MG01). However, orographically it does not belong to the Arda but to the Maritsa River Valley. At present, it is difficult to assess whether the new locality reflects an ongoing expansion of the range or represents a chance observation of the species in an insufficiently studied area. According to Beschkov & Naney (2002), the population of *T. fallax* in Bulgaria was increasing rapidly, the probable reasons for this being human activity (decrease in forest areas, increase in eroded terrain, depopulation of villages), global warming and drying of the climate. Stojanov *et al.* (2011) were of a similar opinion, mentioning that both in the southern parts of the Struma Valley and in the Eastern Rhodopes the abundance of the European Cat Snake had increased over the past 20 years. According to the same authors, this could be interpreted as a consequence of deforestation (habitat change) and global climate warming, specifically the increasing aridity of the forests in recent times. On the other hand, Domozetski *et al.* (2019) suggest that the newly identified *T. fallax* localities, specifically those in the Struma Valley, are due to the higher intensity of field research in recent years, and not to a real expansion of the range.

In conclusion, the Malko Gradishte locality contributes to our understanding of the distribution of *Telescopus fallax* in Bulgaria. Long-term studies in this part of the country, as well as further east (including the Black Sea coast), could provide a clearer picture of the current distribution of the species and possibly answer the question of whether there is an actual expansion of the range.

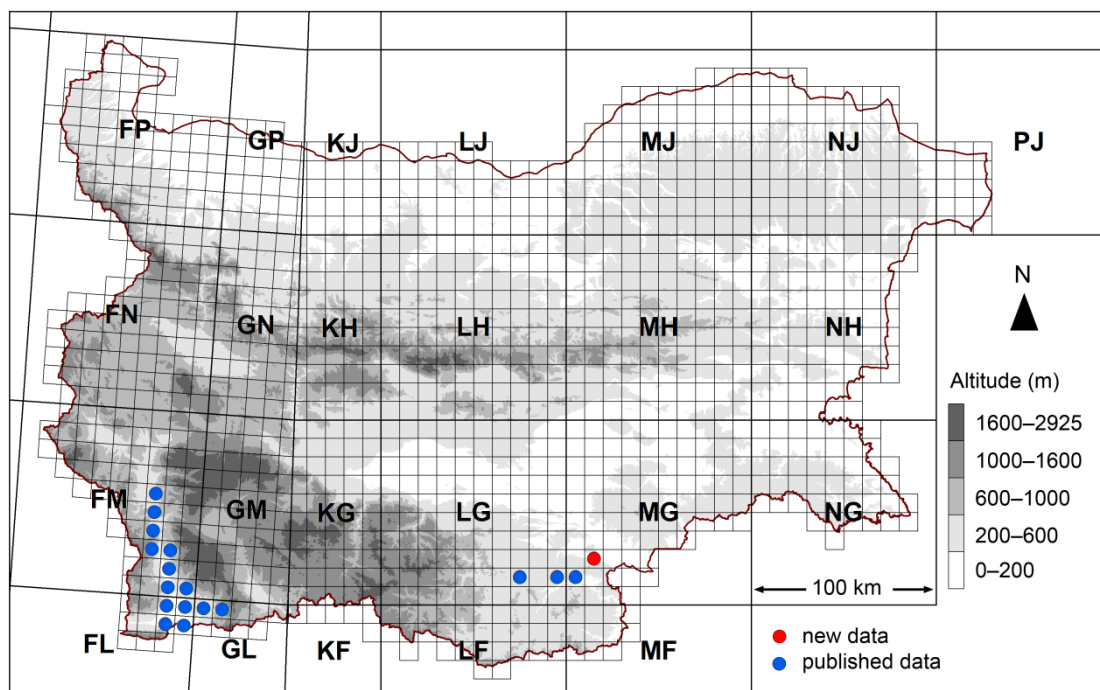


Fig. 1. Distribution of *Telescopus fallax* in Bulgaria based on a 10 km MGRS grid (the codes for the 100 km grid cells are shown) compiled from Stojanov *et al.* (2011), Beschkov (2015), and Domozetski *et al.* (2019).

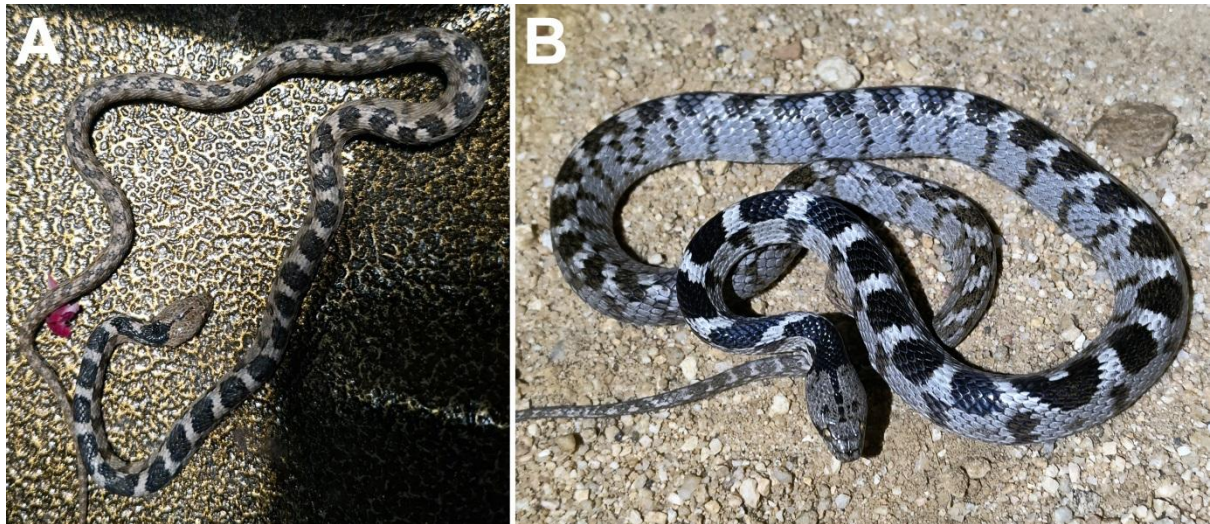


Fig. 2. (A) The dead *Telescopus fallax* specimen recorded at Malko Gradishte on 12 August 2026. (B) The specimen found on 19 September 2026 in the same locality.

Acknowledgements. We are grateful to Gergana Georgieva and Anton Georgiev for the valuable information and the photograph concerning the first observation of *T. fallax* in Malko Gradishte. We thank Emanuil Mitrevichin for the comments that improved the manuscript.

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