

Record of a Western Whip Snake (*Hierophis viridiflavus*) on the Snežnik Plateau (Southern Slovenia)

NAJDBA ČRNICE (*HIEROPHIS VIRIDIFLAVUS*) NA SNEŽNIŠKI PLANOTI (JUŽNA SLOVENIJA)

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On 19th August 2010, Letizia Kozlan, Matija Špacapan and myself were surveying bear dens on the Snežnik Plateau. At 5 p. m., while driving along an unpaved forest road at 1101 metres a.s.l. below the Goljak peak in the southern part of the Snežnik Plateau (UTM VL54, S Slovenia) in the mosaic of dry high-karst meadows and deciduous forests, we caught sight of a large dark snake in the middle of the road. I stopped the car and managed to catch the snake. After a closer inspection I was able to confirm that it was an adult Western Whip Snake (*Hierophis viridiflavus*). The snake was about 120 cm long and dark coloured, characteristic of the eastern part of the species' range (Fig. 1). After photo-documenting the snake, we released it where we had found it and took GPS location. I caught the snake in accordance with the permission No. 35601-32/2010-6 for the protected reptile and amphibian species handling in Slovenia, issued by the Environment Agency of the Republic of Slovenia on 22nd April 2010.

In Slovenia, the Western Whip Snake reaches the north-eastern border of the species' range (Kreiner 2007). According to the recent review of reptiles' distribution in Slovenia, this snake occurs in the western and south-western parts of the country up

to 984 m a.s.l. (Krofel *et al.* 2009). This find, from UTM square VL54 at 1101 m a.s.l., is thus the highest and easternmost record of the Western Whip Snake in Slovenia according to published finds. However, recent finds from Mt. Čaven indicate that it may occur even at 1200 m a.s.l.

(B. Kumar, pers. comm.). In Southern Europe, this species can reach up to 1500 m a.s.l., occasionally even up to 2000 m a.s.l. (Arnold 2004). Southern and western edges of the Snežnik Plateau are known for their thermophilous conditions that enable other typical lowland species to occur at higher elevations (e.g. Scops Owl *Otus scops*; Krofel 2008), so the present find is not unexpected. Since the Snežnik Plateau is covered by a large non-fragmented complex of Dinaric forest further to the east, I assume that the area around Goljak delineates the eastern boundary of the Western Whip Snake's distribution in Slovenia.

Literature

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Figure 1. Western Whip Snake (*Hierophis viridiflavus*) found in August 2010 on the Snežnik Plateau (S Slovenia). Photo: M. Krofel.

Slika 1. Črnica (*Hierophis viridiflavus*), najdena avgusta 2010 na Snežniški planoti (J Slovenija). Foto: M. Krofel.