

# First record of albino Aesculapian Snake (*Elaphe longissima*) in Slovenia

Miha KROFEL

Zavrh pri Borovnici 2, SI-1353 Borovnica. E-mail: mk\_lynx@yahoo.co.uk

**Abstract.** The article presents the discovery of an albino Aesculapian Snake (*Elaphe ongissima*) at Sredma near Brestrnica (UTM WM46, NE Slovenia). The specimen (gender unknown) was about 120 cm long adult with red eyes, pale yellowish underside and dark yellow head, dorsal side and flanks. This is most likely the very first find of this kind in Slovenia.

Key words: reptiles, snakes, Aesculapian Snake, *Elaphe longissima*, albinism, Slovenia

**Izvleček. PRVA NAJDBA ALBINISTIČNEGA OSEBKA NAVADNEGA GOŽA (*ELAPHE LONGISSIMA*) V SLOVENIJI** – Članek opisuje najdbo albinističnega primerka navadnega goža (*Elaphe longissima*) na Sredmi pri Brestrnici (UTM WM46, SV Slovenija). Odrasel osebek neznanega spola je bil dolg 120 cm. Imel je rdeče oči, trebušna stran je bila obarvana svetlo rumeno, preostali deli pa temno rumeno. Verjetno gre za prvo takšno najdbo v Sloveniji.

Ključne besede: plazilci, kače, navadni gož, *Elaphe longissima*, albinizem, Slovenija

The Kozjak region is located in the northeastern part of Slovenia between the Drava river and the Slovenian-Austrian border, west of Maribor. Its herpetofauna is poorly known and for many parts there are no data on distribution of reptiles. So far, the following nine species have been recorded in the area: Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*), Common Wall Lizard (*Podarcis muralis*), Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), Green Lizard (*Lacerta viridis/bilineata*), Smooth Snake (*Coronella austriaca*), Aesculapian Snake (*Elaphe longissima*), Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*), Dice Snake (*Natrix tessellata*) and Nose-horned Viper (*Vipera ammodytes*) (Marktanner-Turnretschner 1908, Tome 1996, personal observations).

In June 2003, I found an unusual snake of yellow coloration at Sredma near Brestrnica in the eastern part of the Kozjak region (UTM WM46, 430 m a.s.l.). It turned out to be an albino

Aesculapian Snake, a 120 cm long adult. Unfortunately, I was not able to determine the gender.

Aesculapian Snakes are usually uniform grey-buff to olive-brown with small white spots on the dorsal side and flanks and with pale yellowish or whitish underside (Arnold & Burton 1978). This particular specimen had normal pale yellowish underside, but other parts were dark yellow. Small white spots on the scale edges were present, similarly as on the normally coloured specimens. Lack of a dark pigment was also noticed in the eyes, which were red.

Occurrences of the albinism among snakes in nature are not unknown, although they are rare, especially among adults (Ferri & Bettiga 1992). To my knowledge, this is the first albino Aesculapian Snake found in nature in Slovenia. In 1992, a similar find of an adult albino Aesculapian Snake was reported from Colico (Como) in Lombardy and was believed to be the first such mutation recorded in Italy (Ferri & Bettiga 1992).

The albino specimen recorded at Sredma was found on the sunward clayey edge of a mixed forest (*Castaneo sativae-Fagetum*) along an abandoned vineyard. On this same forest edge, which is roughly 0.5-2 m high, two other reptile species have also been observed: Common Wall Lizard (*Podarcis muralis*) and Green Lizard (*Lacerta viridis/bilineata*).

## Povzetek

Razširjenost plazilcev Kozjaka je slabo poznana. Doslej je bilo na tem območju najdenih devet vrst plazilcev, od tega pet vrst kač (Marktanner-Turnretscher 1908, Tome 1996, lastna opazovanja). Junija 2003 sem na Sredmi pri Brestrnici (UTM WM46, 430 m n. v., SV Slovenija) našel albinističen primerek navadnega goža (*Elaphe longissima*). Kača je bila po trebušni strani obarvana svetlo rumeno, po hrbtu, bokih in glavi pa temno rumeno. Podobno kot pri običajnih primerkih navadnih gožev je bilo po hrbtu moč opaziti majhne bele pike. Oči so bile rdeče. Osebek neznanega spola je bil dolg 120 cm in popolnoma odrasel. Po meni dostopnih podatkih je to prvo odkritje albinizma pri navadnih gožih na območju Slovenije. Iz Italije – bližine kraja Colico v Lombardiji – o odkritju albinističnega primerka navadnega goža poročata Ferri in Bettiga (1992). Opisani primerek s Sredme je bil najden na prisojnem ilovnatem robu mešanega gozda (*Castaneo sativae-Fagetum*) ob opuščnem vinogradu. Na istem mestu sem že večkrat opazoval tudi pozidne kuščarice (*Podarcis muralis*) in zelence (*Lacerta viridis/bilineata*).



Figure 1. The albino Aesculapian Snake (*Elaphe longissima*) photographed in the summer of 2003 at Sredma near Brestrnica (NE Slovenia) (photo: Miha Krofel).  
Slika 1. Albinistični primerek navadnega goža (*Elaphe longissima*), fotografiran na Sredmi pri Brestrnici poleti 2003 (foto: Miha Krofel).

## Literature

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