



XX European Congress  
of Herpetology  
Milan, 2-6 September 2019

# PROGRAM & ABSTRACTS



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Please cite this volume as:

Ficetola, G. F., R. Sacchi, S. Scali, R. Manenti, A. Coladonato, A. Melotto, M. Falaschi, E. Razzetti, M. Mangiacotti, S. Canessa, A. Villa, C. Corti, I. van Riemsdijk, B. Wielstra, J. D. Ludwigs, G. Montinaro, J. Crnobrnja-Isailović, M. Denoël, A. Kaliontzopoulou, D. Cogalniceanu, J. Vörös, P. Lymberakis, M. Zuffi, and M. Sannolo, editors. 2019. XX European Congress of Herpetology, Milan, 2-6 September 2019. Program and Abstracts. S.E.H., Milano.

ISBN: 979-12-200-5284-9

**BALKAN HERPS PROJECT: SPATIAL CONSERVATION PRIORITIES FOR THE AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES IN THE BALKAN PENINSULA**

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The Balkan Peninsula is among the most biologically diverse areas in Europe. It has more than 120 species of amphibians and reptiles with several endemics. Protection of the Balkans is a high responsibility and requires sufficient and effective protected area coverage. The aim of the Balkan Herps project is to assess the representation of the regional herpetofauna under the current protected area network and reveal potential shortfalls. We created a database of distribution records ([openbiomaps.org/projects/balkanherps](http://openbiomaps.org/projects/balkanherps)) and built 30' resolution species distribution models using Bioclim and Envirem explanatory variables. We applied the systematic conservation planning tool called Zonation which ranked the sites in the study area by their importance. Generally, the Adriatic Coast, Peloponnese, Thrace and Danube Delta had higher scores while the Central Balkans had lesser. We revealed the best 17% of the area and calculated its coverage by protected areas. We found 34% coverage with obvious gaps occurring in non-EU countries, but we also found shortfalls for example in the Peloponnese and Rhodope regions. It is promising that many deficiencies can be likely solved by the designation of new Natura 2000 areas in the right places in EU candidate countries. However, there are still gaps in the Balkan Herps database, but the collaboration in progress could give a foundation for a cross-border conservation plan in the Balkan Peninsula to effectively protect herpetological diversity.