

HERPETOLOGIA

A column for short herpetological contributions

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AN UNEXPECTED MEETING WITH COLUBER VIRIDIFLAVUS

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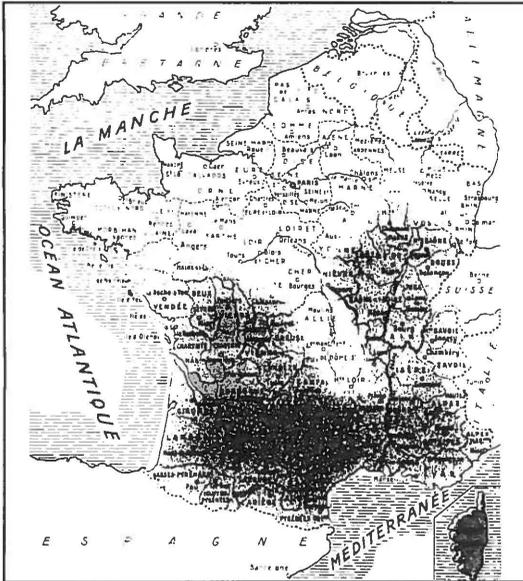
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Snakes lead a secret way of life. Even when you are looking for them, you don't find them. Where was this again, I read these words, or words of the same tenor? That snakes are well characterised by this statement, I have noted experimentally during my summer holiday last year. Although I don't especially choose my destination for it, I always try to manipulate the decision for a special holiday-abode in such a direction, that the chance to meet snakes is more than average. It may be clear that nature camping-sites get my preference over camping-sites with disco's and lotto games. At my usual holiday destination in Spain I was often able to observe, and sometimes photograph, *Elaphe longissima*, *Natrix maura*, *Malpolon monspessulanus* and *Vipera aspis*(?).

Last year, family reasons made it necessary to skip my favourite holiday destination for one time. I had already accepted the fact that I wouldn't see snakes this year, however, it turned out better than was expected. At a very improbable place in the department Indre et Loire in France, about 50 kilometers above Tours, *Coluber viridiflavus* didn't care a bit about the many tourists who shared a bushy habitat with her. Lots of tents were posted at the edge of a large grass field. At one side of this field there was a small wood that was daily visited by many tourists, since the hygiene facility was hidden in it.

When I didn't walk back the usual way, after a visit to the above-mentioned location on a sunny day, but walked around over some overgrown paths, I eventually came to an open space. The sun could shine freely, in the knee-high grass. Since I was definitely not prepared for it and I also didn't expect snakes that near to people, I was very frightened when a snake suddenly fled in panic just before my feet; I had not seen it earlier because it was invisible against the natural background. If she had kept still I probably would not have seen her at all. Everything went so fast that I hardly had seen the colours and length, or what species it was.

Once I knew that there was a snake in the wood, I went looking more prepared the next day. However, before I arrived at the open place, a violent rustling at another place in the grass which grew along the path showed that I disturbed a snake again. This time



Distribution area of *Coluber viridiflavus* (Nauelleau, page 32).

I was prepared and could see the typical colours of *Coluber viridiflavus* before the animal hid in the bushes behind the grass. The place in the grass the animal had lain was rather flattened. Probably a regular basking-place.

In the following days I was repeatedly successful in observing a basking *Coluber viridiflavus*. The photographing was less successful: in spite of a tele-lens I could not get high enough above the snake to make a clear picture. The pictures show mostly grass.

Closer inspection of the very small, bushy habitat revealed that another *Coluber viridiflavus* was present between the roots of a tree, only four meters away from the tent of an unsuspecting, older couple. I kept my knowledge to myself!

I find this experience for two reasons a nice experience: first, because, against my expectations, snakes in France seem to be able to live close near people and secondly because this meeting took place above the most-northern border of the distribution area of *Coluber viridiflavus* as given by for example Nauelleau (see distributionmap). The distribution map of Géniez and Grillet is very indistinctive, but is, at first sight corresponding with Nauelleau (Geniez, Cartes de repartition des especes).

REFERENCES

- Géniez, Philippe et Grillet, Pierre, Les couleuvres et les vipères. Série 'Comment vivent-ils', volume 22. Atlas Visuels Payot Lausanne, 1989.
- Nauelleau, G., 1987. Les serpents de France. Revue française d'aquariologie. Mai 1987. Centre d'Etudes Biologiques des Animaux Sauvages. Villiers-en-Bois, 79360 Beauvoir-sur-Niort.