

Dolichophis caspius (Serpentes: Colubridae) in Romania: New distribution records from the northern limit of its range

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Abstract: Herein we present 2 new localities for *Dolichophis caspius* in southern Romania: Drăgăneşti Olt and Căscioarele.

Key words: *Dolichophis caspius*, new localities, distribution, Romania

Dolichophis caspius (Gmelin, 1789) is present in southeastern Europe—Romania being a segment of its northern range limits (Szczerebak, 1997). The species is present only in the extreme south of the country and most of its records are very old, some even dating from the 1930s (Băcescu, 1937; Fuhn and Vancea, 1961; Şerban, 1972). Recent records have only appeared during the last few years—also localized in the southern part of the country (Covaciu-Marcov et al., 2005, 2009; Lazăr et al., 2005; Strugariu and Gherghel 2007, 2008). While the species is common and widespread in Dobrudja (Covaciu-Marcov et al., 2006), its distribution is poorly known in other parts of Romania, where it is very rare and apparently highly threatened. According to national legislation (OUG 57/2007), *D. caspius* is a species of community interest that requires strict protection.

The present paper presents 2 additional localities for the Large Whip Snake, which increases our knowledge regarding the distribution of this species at the northern limit of its range. In 2008 we observed this snake species in 2 new localities in southern Romania: Drăgăneşti Olt and Căscioarele (Table), both of which are located in the Romanian Plain (Figure 1). The Large Whip Snakes were observed accidentally while we were performing other herpetological studies in the area. At least one of the locations, Drăgăneşti Olt, represents a very important first, because the species was found to the east of the Olt River, in the county of Olt. The species had not been previously recorded in the region. The second location, Căscioarele, is in the vicinity of another location from which the species was previously recorded; however, the species was thought to be extinct at that location (Iftime, 2001, 2005) (Table).

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Table. 2008 Observations of *D. caspius* in southern Romania.

Locality	Date	Elevation	Geographical coordinates	Observation matter
Drăgănești Olt	21.04.2008	80 m	44°09'23"N, 24°32'22"E	1 Live specimen
Drăgănești Olt	21.04.2008	85 m	44°09'23"N, 24°32'22"E	1 Specimen killed by locals
Căscioarele	16.08.2008	47 m	44°07'34"N, 26°25'32"E	1 Road-killed specimen

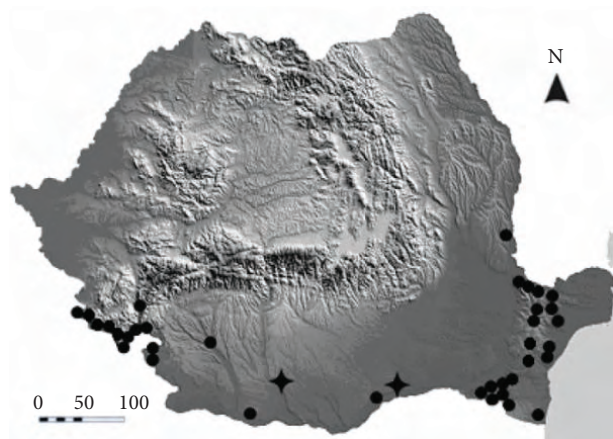


Figure 1. Distribution of *Dolichophis caspius* in Romania.
 ● Old localities (Iftime, 2005; Lazăr et al., 2005; Covaciu Marcov et al., 2005, 2006, 2009; Strugariu and Gherghel, 2007, 2008). New localities (1. Drăgănești Olt, 2. Căscioarele).

These results suggest that *D. caspius* is distributed across a continuous range in southern Romania—a range that comprises the low areas located along the Danube, stretching to the north towards the interior of the country along the main rivers (e.g. Olt or Jiu). This range is, however, reduced if we report it to the surface of the country, which is probably fragmented. The Romanian Plain is severely affected by human activity—mostly transformation into agricultural fields.

D. caspius populates open habitats in both localities. At Drăgănești Olt the species' habitat is

situated on a hilly slope facing west, flanking the Olt River. Here, in the region between Drăgănești Olt and Dăneasa Village are grassy open areas, sometimes covered with a few rare bushes. This zone is crossed by a railroad and bordered in many places by bushes. Near Căscioarele the Large Whip Snake also occurs in bushy open areas, situated on the limit between the lower Danube Meadow and the Romanian Plain. Near this habitat areas covered with vines are also present.

Two of the observed specimens were dead. At Drăgănești Olt, a snake was killed by a local, while at Căscioarele a specimen was killed by road traffic (Figure 2). According to the inhabitants of Drăgănești Olt, road-killed snakes are a rather common sight. Thus, in the southern part of Romania, road-related mortality also represents a cause for the decline of the species, which has also been observed in other parts of the species' range (Korsós et al., 2002).



Figure 2. Road-killed *Dolichophis caspius* from Căscioarele.

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