

SHORT COMMUNICATION

First records of *Tarentola mauritanica* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Reptilia; Gekkonidae) in the Azores

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INTRODUCTION

The Moorish gecko *Tarentola mauritanica* (Linnaeus, 1758) is a widespread species native to the Mediterranean region from southern France to Greece and northern Africa (Loveridge 1947; Martínez-Rica 1997; Hóðar 2002; Perera et al. 2008, 2010; Plezeguelos et al. 2008). It has recently been reported as living and breeding in California (Marhdt 1998) and also as an introduced species in Madeira (Báez & Biscoito 1993). *Tarentola mauritanica* is paraphyletic with respect to *T. angustimentalis* Steindachner, 1891, a Canary Islands endemic (Harris et al. 2004a). Here we report new occurrences of the Moorish gecko on Terceira Island, Azores archipelago, and 3 other occurrences on the islands of São Miguel and Faial. The possibility of an already established breeding population is discussed.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Two live specimens of *Tarentola mauritanica* were collected in the central area of the city of



Fig. 1. A juvenile *Tarentola mauritanica* collected in June 2009 inside a house on the outskirts of Angra do Heroísmo, Terceira Island. Photo by R.E.



Fig. 2. An adult, tailless, *Tarentola mauritanica*, caught in July 2009 inside a box of lettuce imported from mainland Portugal and put for sale in a supermarket on the outskirts of Angra do Heroísmo, Terceira Island. Photo by R.E.

Angra do Heroísmo, Terceira Island, Azores. On 1 January 2010 a juvenile of 42 mm Total length (Fig. 1) (specimen A) was captured by one of the authors (JL) outside his house after an adult had been killed and two other animals had been seen alive in the same house as well as one in a neighbouring house (pers. comm. to R.E.).

A second specimen (specimen B), caught alive on 2 November 2007 by one of the authors (JPB) from a box of lettuce imported from mainland Portugal, was kept in a terrarium until 1 of March 2008. When it died the length without tail was of 93 mm (Fig. 2). Table 1 summarises the known occurrences of *T. mauritanica* in the Azores.

The specimens were fixed in 10% formalin and preserved in 70% alcohol and deposited in the Arruda Furtado collection of Department of Agriculture (University of the Azores) under the provisional catalogue numbers, EFAF_R0001 and EFAF_R0002, respectively.

Table 1. Dates and locality of confirmed sightings/collection of *Tarentola mauritanica* in the Azores.

Island	Locality	Date
Terceira	Angra do Heroísmo	Jan 2007
Terceira	Angra do Heroísmo	Nov 2007
São Miguel	Ponta Delgada	2002
São Miguel	Ponta Delgada	2002-2009
São Miguel	Fajã de Cima	2002-2009
São Miguel	Pico Salomão	2010
Faial	Horta	2009

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As reported by Báez & Biscoito (1993) for Madeira, the Moorish gecko seems also to be an accidental anthropogenic introduction in the Azores. Although our specimen B was clearly a case of an adult imported from mainland Portugal inside a box of lettuce, specimen A was probably born on the island, due to its small size and reports of adults around the same area.

The absence of native populations of geckos in the Azores implies that the native invertebrate species did not co-evolve with this predator, in fact with any similar one, being eventually vulnerable to increase predation at least in less impacted and preserved areas. However, it is not clear which will be the habitat selection of *Tarentola mauritanica* in the Azores due to the species' rate of adaptability and genetic differences between known populations (see Carranza 2000, 2002; Harris et al. 2004a,b). If the species becomes restricted to low altitude urban areas the impact on native invertebrate species will be minimal. Inconclusive evidence via anecdotal reports suggests that *Tarentola mauritanica* is limited to sites under anthropogenic influence mainly on low altitude urban place. The antropophilic nature of this species is suggested by Hódar (2002). Recent reports of live specimen from Faial and São Miguel islands, in the Azores (photos and pers. comm. to P. Borges) show specimen apparently well adapted to coastal and urban environments such as airports and industrial areas. Only one sighting is confirmed from higher altitudes (Pico Salomão, S. Miguel Island, pers. comm. to P. Borges).

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