HABITAT SELECTIVITY IN A LIZARD COMMUNITY

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We studied the habitat availability and use of four lizard species occurring in the Natura 2000 ROSCI0123 Măcin Mountains protected area, located in the southeastern part of Romania, at the northern limit of the Balkan Peninsula, close to the Danube River. It covers an area of 18,546 ha and the highest peak rises 467 meters above sea level. Eleven Natura 2000 habitat types were identified and mapped within the protected area. We used over 1500 georeferenced occurrence records for the four species of lizards occurring there collected during an ongoing inventory that started in 2006. The species occurrences were each associated with a habitat type, and we assumed that the number of records within each habitat type was a proxy of habitat use. All four lizard species showed selectivity in habitat use to different degrees. Thus *Podarcis tauricus* avoided 55% of habitat types, *Lacerta viridis* and *Ablepharus kitaibelli* avoided 64% while *Lacerta trilineata* avoided 73% of habitat types. All four species preferred one single habitat: 40C0 "Ponto-Sarmatic deciduous thickets". The habitat with the highest preference was 8230 "Siliceous rocks with pioneer vegetation..." for *Podarcis tauricus*, 8220 "Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation" for *Lacerta trilineata*, 40C0 "Ponto-Sarmatic deciduous thickets" for L. viridis and 91AA "Eastern white oak woods" for *Ablepharus kitaibelli*. The habitat niche of the four species varied largely, thus reducing competition and predation by larger species.