P3 - Results of the first Herpetological Survey of Israel's Mediterranean islands

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Islands in the Mediterranean often contain rich herpetological communities, comprised of both relictual populations from periods of lower sea levels, and species introduced by direct or indirect anthropogenic activity. Israel's few Mediterranean islands have long been of interest to conservation agencies due to their key role as nesting grounds for various bird species, but there is no knowledge of their herpetofauna.

We conducted the first herpetological survey of five vegetated Israeli islands during the spring seasons of 2017 and 2018. The islands range in size from ~0.002 to ~0.008 km^2, and are between ~40 and ~210 m away from the mainland. We recorded reptiles on four of the five islands, and five species in total. Species richness per island ranged from 0 to 4 species, and each island had a distinct assemblage. The most common species was *Hemidactylus turcicus*, which was present on all four islands on which we recorded reptiles, and one species (*Mauremys rivulata*) was non-resident.

The presence of these species on the islands remains puzzling. While some, such as *H. turcicus* may have arrived via anthropogenic introduction, some species such as *Acanthodactylus boskianus* are not commensal, and so may represent relictual populations. Further study, including molecular phylogenetics and phylogeography, may help resolve the open question of the origin of these insular populations.