

FIRST RECORD OF A *PELOPHYLAX EPEIROTICUS* POPULATION (ANURA: RANIDAE) EAST OF PINDOS MT. RANGE, FAR OUTSIDE OF ITS NATURAL RANGE

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Epirus Water Frog, *Pelophylax epeiroticus* (Schneider, Sofianidou & Kyriakopoulou-Sklavounou, 1984) is a shy, medium sized, highly aquatic water frog that belongs to the family Ranidae (Speybroeck et al. 2016). It is mainly associated with lowland freshwater habitats with rich shore vegetation, including large marshes, calm rivers and canals, from sea level up to 500 m.a.s.l. (Arlond & Ovenden 2002, Speybroeck et al. 2016, Dufresnes 2019). The species' range is restricted to western Greece along the Ionian coast, including the island of Corfu and NW Peloponnese, as well as in a small part of SW Albania (Jablonski 2011, Szabolcs et al. 2017, Dufresnes 2019), following a known biogeographic pattern that has also been observed in many taxa and evolutionary clades that are restricted west of the Dinarides and the Pindos mountain range (see Strachinis et al. 2021). Epirus Water Frog can usually be found in sympatry with Greek Marsh Frog *Pelophylax kurtmuelleri* (Gayda, 1940) which frequently hybridizes with (Radojicic et al. 2015, Dufresnes 2019). The species is currently listed as "Near Threatened" in the IUCN Red List with an extent of occurrence of 25.660 km², occurring in 10 or fewer threat-defined locations, and facing a continuing habitat decline, making it close to qualifying for "Vulnerable" (IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group 2020). The main threats of the species are general loss of wetland habitat, water pollution and infections by the fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group 2020) whose presence has been recently detected in both Greece and Albania (Azmanis et al. 2016, Vojar et al. 2017). In this note, a population of Epirus Water Frog outside of its known range and east of the Mt. Pindos range is presented for the first time.

On May 16th May 2021, during a herpetological survey, between Keramidi and Vlochos villages (between the cities of Trikala and Larissa), numerous Epirus Water Frog breeding calls could be heard along canals parallel to Enipeas and Kalentzis river (area between 39.5624, 22.0766 and 39.5624 22.0766 [Lat, Lon]), together with Greek Marsh Frog calls. The breeding calls were recorded and deposited as evidence in the Natural History Museum of Crete (voucher number: NHMC80.2.109.56). They were also analysed with Cockos REAPER 6.36 resulting in the characteristic wave form that is herein being used as a diagnostic (Fig. 1). Epirus Water Frog's breeding call is one of the most distinguishable and identifiable between all Greek *Pelophylax* species (for comparison see Strachinis & Roussos 2016). Amongst Epirus Water Frog and Greek Marsh Frog calls, some intermediate breeding

Pelophylax epeiroticus east of Mt. Pindos

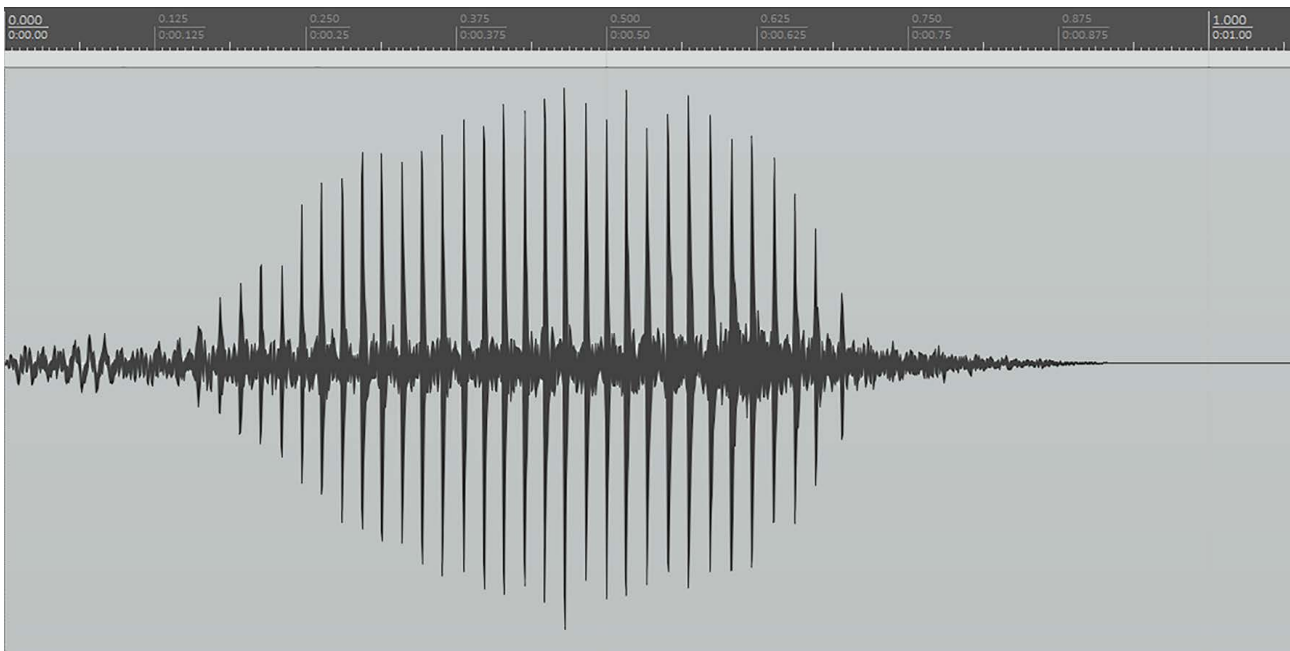


Fig. 1. Wave form of an isolated breeding call of Epirus Water Frog (*Pelophylax epeiroticus*) found near Keramidi village, Trikala, Greece. The time scale is shown in seconds.

calls could be heard, indicating hybridization between the two species. A more comprehensive and thorough survey is necessary to be conducted in order to reveal the actual extent of this probably introduced and established population in the wider area which is crossed by numerous rivers, streams and canals. Given the geomorphology of the area and the absence of any significant geographical barrier in the vallies of Trikala and Larissa, Epirus Water Frog could now disperse easily and possibly rapidly in central Greece.

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