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Über Bewegungsradius und Ruhepausen wild lebender maurischer Landschildkröten

About moving distances and resting periods of wild spur-thighed tortoise Testudo graeca

Abstract

For about the last 20 years, I have regularly visited the same natural habitat of *Testudo graeca ibera* in South Turkey, observing the local small population of spur-thighed turtles there. During these visits, I realized that these turtles obviously are not moving around too much: I found many of them twice or even three times within one week in the same area. Therefore for the next visit, I decided to find an adult turtle early in the morning and to follow this very reptile, unnoticed, for as many hours as possible, measuring, among others, the moving distances and resting and feeding periods. This programme took place in June 2008.

It was possible to do the observations with two different adult turtles. I followed the first for a total of 5 hours, before it disappeared at around noon time, in to a wide thicket of *Opuntia* sp. During these 5 hours, the turtle, rather surprisingly, only covered a total distance of slightly less than 3.5 metres; the largest distance covered without any interruption (break) was 1.5 metres. I had more luck with the second turtle on a different day and followed and observed it for 8 hours. This turtle was much more active than the first one, with a cumulative moving distance of approx. 63 metres during the whole day. However, this animal only moved within a certain area of not more than 40 square metres. Weather conditions were similar during the observations: sunny hot days with peak temperatures of up to 31 °C in the shade in the early afternoon. It is worth mentioning that I repeatedly re-found both turtles during my stay on different days, one of them even exactly at the same location.

My conclusion for keeping turtles in our gardens: although it is of course not wrong to offer captive-kept turtles as large an area as possible, it seems that for a few individuals overly large areas are not a necessity. Even if a breeding group of two females and one male should be kept in a garden of say 100 square metres or more, the male will quickly find the females and must be removed in case of continuous aggressive attacks. That same measure has to be taken in case of a pen of only 20 square metres.

Key words

Testudines: Testudinidae, *Testudo graeca ibera* in Southern Turkey; observations in the wild; moving distances over several hours; personal conclusion for captive maintenance

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