

Northeastern habitat border of  
*Malpolon monspessulanus*  
(HERMANN, 1804)  
in the Lower-Volga region

*Malpolon monspessulanus* (HERMANN, 1804), is the only representative of the genus *Malpolon* in the Russian herpetofauna, inhabiting southeastern European Russia (ANANJEVA et al. 2004). In the whole, the distribution limits of this species are well known. However, some peripheral habitats

of *M. monspessulanus* still remain underrevealed because of the mosaic character of its distribution. This applies to the northeastern part of the whole *M. monspessulanus* habitat, in particular, to the Astrakhan region and Republic Kalmykia.

Until recently, the records of *M. monspessulanus* in the Lower-Volga region within the Astrakhan region and its adjacent territories have been rare enough. There were no exact data about these reptiles at that time. In the Astrakhan region, few findings of *M. monspessulanus* at the boundary with

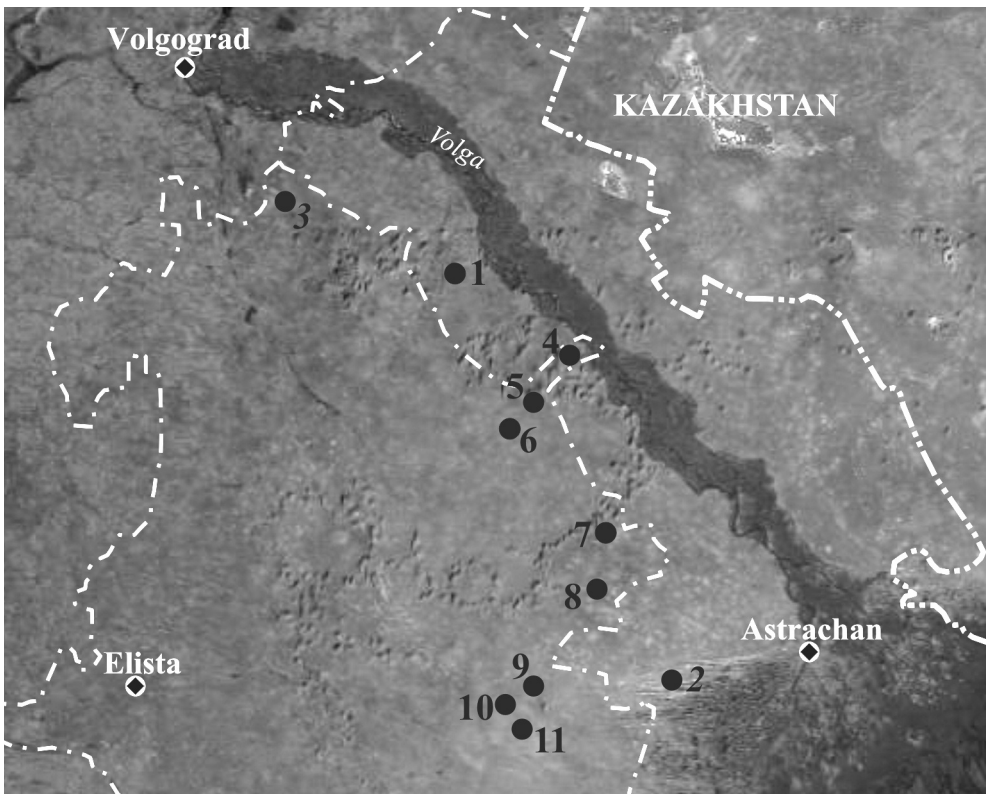


Fig. 1: Distribution of *Malpolon monspessulanus* (HERMANN, 1804) in the Lower-Volga region. 1-2 - Astrakhan region; 3-11 - Kalmykia. 1 - Chernyi Yar district, near town Solionoe Zaymishche (ZM SSU); 2 - Nariman district, Kos-Kyzyl sands (IEVB); 3 - Malye Derbety district, near town Khonch-Nur (ZM KSU); 4 - Yustin district, near town Tsagan Aman (KIREEV 1982); 5 - Yustin district, near town Chompot (KIREEV 1982); 6 - Yustin district, near town Tatal (KIREEV 1982); 7 - Yustin district, near town Bergin (Polynnoe) (KIREEV 1982); 8 - Yustin district, near town Smushkovo (KIREEV 1982); 9 - Yashkul district, near town Khulkhuta (ZM MSU); 10 - Yashkul district, ur. Davsun-Khuduk (ZM KSU); 11 - Yashkul district, ur. Malye Buzgi (ZIN).

Collections acronyms. Zoological Museums of the Kalmykian (ZM KSU, Elista), Moscow (ZM MSU, Moscow) and Saratov State Universities (ZM SSU, Saratov), Institute of Ecology of the Volga river basin, Russian Academy of Sciences (IEVB, Togliatti) and Zoological Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences (ZIN, Saint-Petersburg).

Kalmykia in the right-bank part (Yenotaevka district) were known; in addition, in the left-bank part (Krasnyi Yar district), specimens were caught near the town Dosang in 1953 (BOZHANSKI 2004), and reported from the Kharabali (v. Mikhaylovka) and Krasnyi Yar (v. Seitovka) districts (DE HAAN 1999).

However, a field survey in spring of 2009 enabled the author to reveal the habitation of *M. monspessulanus* much northward of the known points in the Astrakhan region. As an example, the habitation of *M. monspessulanus* on open stationary sites near the town Solionoe Zaymishche (47°55'N, 46°07'E) in the Chernyi Yar district (1 in Fig. 1) was revealed on 25 April, 2009. There, the relative abundance of *M. monspessulanus* in the course of the route was two individuals per 10 km. Comparable values of the abundance are characteristic of *M. monspessulanus* in similar stations in the adjacent territory of the Republic Kalmykia (TABACHISHIN & ZHDOKOVA 2002; ZHDOKOVA 2003). Moreover, somewhat earlier (12 May, 2005) the habitation of *M. monspessulanus* was revealed in the Kos-Kyzyl sands (46°20'N, 47°09'E) (2 in Fig. 1) in the Nariman district, the Astrakhan region (BAKIEV & PESKOV 2006).

These available data are evidence of the distribution of *M. monspessulanus* being wide, but of mosaic character, in the vast territories of the Astrakhan region and the adjacent Republic Kalmykia. The existing evidence of *M. monspessulanus* penetration to the territory of the Kharabali and Krasnyi Yar districts in the Astrakhan Trans-Volga region (CHERNOV 1954; DE HAAN 1999) was not confirmed by the present collections and observations. The habitation of *M. monspessulanus* is mainly due to cereal-wormwood communities and bush brushwood among ridge and dissipating sands. The administrative boundary with the Volgograd region is the northern limits of the *M. monspessulanus* habitat, in the east the reliable habitation zone of *M. monspessulanus* is limited by the Volga flood-lands.

In view of the current trend of gradual increase of the average annual temperatures within the territory under study (ТИТКОВА 2003), some stabilization of the moisture indices, and the reduction of pasture load, an

insignificant increase of the *M. monspessulanus* abundance and slow expansion of the habitat borders in the Lower-Volga region could be expected in the near years. The further dynamics of *M. monspessulanus* distribution in the Astrakhan region and its adjacent territories requires thorough studies.

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