



First record of *Prionotropis willemsoni* (Massa & Ünal, 2015) in Albania

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Abstract

Prionotropis willemsoni, previously known as endemic to Greece, was observed in Albania at the end of August 2023, in the north-western extension of Mt Nemërçkë. A brief description of the habitat and considerations for reassessing its status are discussed in this short note.

Keywords: Nemërçkë Mountain, Pamphagidae, species conservation

Zusammenfassung

Erstnachweis von *Prionotropis willemsoni* (Massa & Ünal, 2015) in Albanien. *Prionotropis willemsoni*, früher als in Griechenland endemisch bekannt, wurde Ende August 2023 in Albanien im nordwestlichen Ausläufer des Berges Nemërçkë beobachtet. Hier werden eine kurze Beschreibung des Habitats und Überlegungen zur Neubewertung des Gefährdungsstatus der Art präsentiert.

Schlüsselwörter: Artenschutz, Berg Nemërçkë, Pamphagidae

On August 21, 2023, during a field research intended to refine the known distribution area of the populations of *Peripodisma tympii* (Willemse, 1972) on Mount Nemërçkë in Albania, we had the satisfaction of finding an adult female of *Prionotropis willemsoni* (Fig.1), Pamphagidae, cited so far only from the Zagori region in Greece (Massa et al. 2015; Willemse et al. 2018; Lemonnier-Darcemont et al. 2022). We already suspected Nemërçkë Mountain range to be potentially favourable for this species, but our investigations carried out in June at lower altitudes had been fruitless.



Fig. 1: *Prionotropis willemsorum* female, Nemërckë Mt – Albania

This new locality is about thirty kilometres from the northernmost station in Greece (Fig.2). The habitat consists of dry steppe grassland with some bushes of *Juniperus sp.* and *Astragalus sp.* (Fig.3). We find there also populations of grasshoppers linked to this habitat type, such as *Peripodisma tymphii*, *Stenobothrus clavatus* (Willemse, 1979), *Stenobothrus fischeri* (Eversmann, 1848), *Celes variabilis* (Pallas, 1771), *Arcyptera microptera* (Fischer von Waldheim, 1833). The relatively high elevation, 1450 m a.s.l., could explain this late occurrence in season, the species being generally seen in Greece up to July, but at lower altitudes (<1130 m a.s.l.). Due to the late time of the day of this finding, we did not spend more time searching for other individuals.

It should be noted that this habitat is quite different from the habitats of the populations of Greece, recently studied, in which the ligneous vegetation appears to be more and more important (Lemmonier-Darcemont et al. 2022). In this new locality, there are steppe grasslands which are regularly pastured by several small herds of sheep and goats, each led by a shepherd. This type of traditional pastoralism, based on local breeds, is still very present today in the mountains of southern Albania. In Greece, the continuous decline in the extensive breeding of small ruminants, sometimes to the benefit of cattle, contributes to the degradation of natural environments. This has the direct consequences of reducing floristic diversity with a preponderance of plants not (or very little) eaten by livestock (e.g. *Phlomis fruticosa*), and in some areas, to their evolution towards closed ligneous formations.

Prionotropis willemsorum is currently assessed endangered (EN) in the IUCN Red list (Willemse & Hochkirch 2016). Its EOO (extent of occurrence) assessed to be 35 km² after our field studies 2021 and 2022 in Greece, is now extended at least to 200 km². This discovery in the south of Albania opens up new perspectives in the knowledge to the distribution of this taxon, especially on the mountains close to this region. Surveys will be scheduled at the end of spring 2024, and should make it possible to refine the overall status of this taxon.

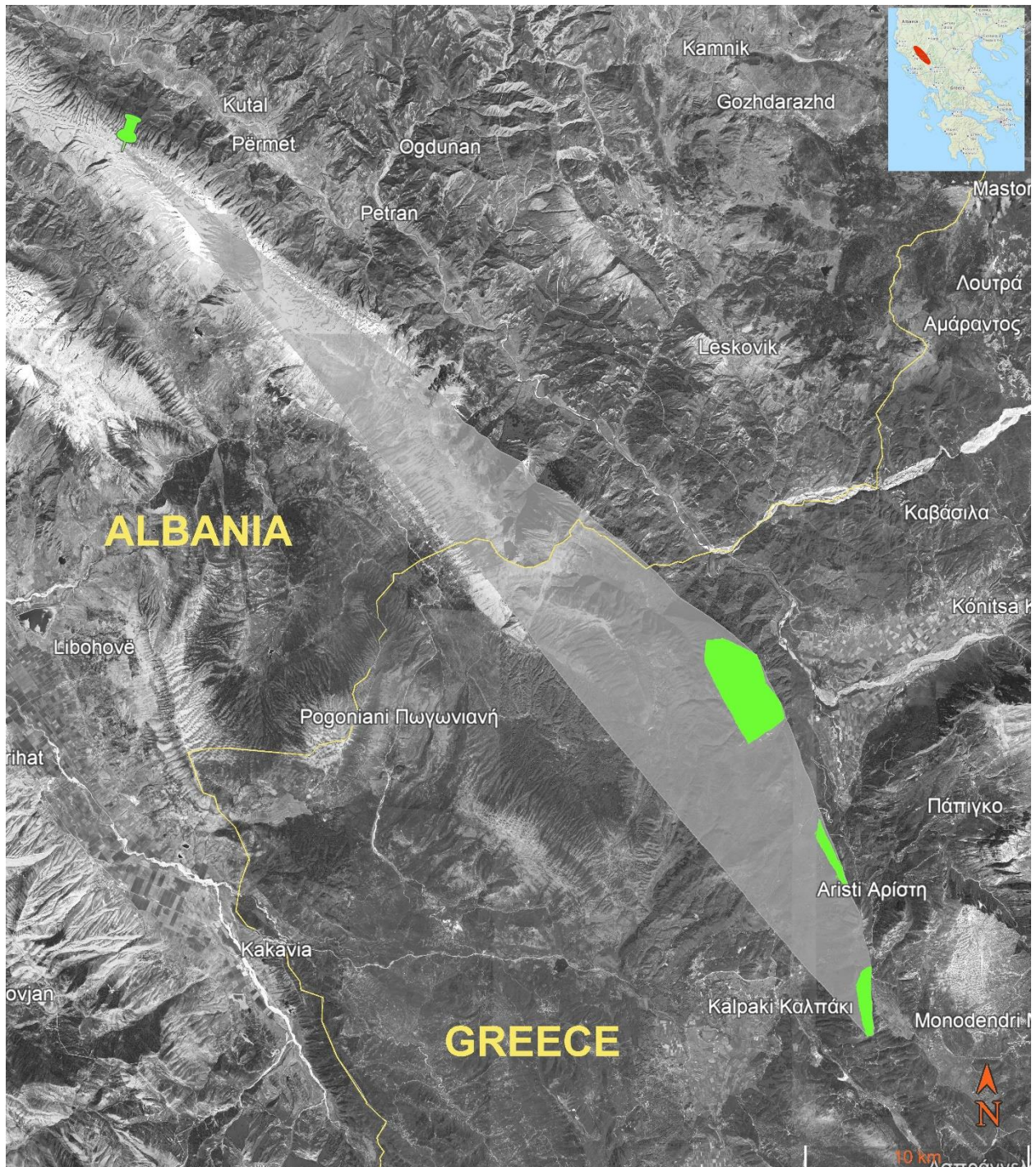


Fig. 2: Map of the new distribution of *Prionotropis willemsorum*. In red, the global area in the small map of the southern Balkans. In green, areas of known distribution in Greece, and the new spot in Albania. In light grey, the new extent of occurrence (EOO).



Fig. 3: Habitat of the new locality of *Prionotropis willemsorum* in Albania.

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