Good morning, Corsica!

In Corsica, Archaeolacerta bedriagae occurs in high-altitude mountain areas as well as in some coastal sections. The lowland and highland populations are different in genetic and morphologic regards – we wanted to see both. Hence, the first station of our trip was Corte, a small town in the Center of the Haute Corse mountain area. This part of Corsica has really impressive landscapes – a fact that obviously had been noticed by others before: the complete area was crowded with tourists. So, we had to face fully booked hotels, caravans trying to push through narrow mountain roads and hordes of hikers.

The first spot we visited were the „Cascades des Anglais“ at Vizzavona, an area where Archaeolacerta bedriagae easily can be photographed. Besides the rock lizards we also saw some Podarcis tiliguerta – an omnipresent lizard on Corsica. As some scientific papers have stated that Podarcis tiliguerta, an endemic species of Corsica and Sardinia, might be a species complex we shot pictures of these lizard in each station we visited. You never know if there will be some species-splitting sometime…
Soon, the first Archaeolacerta bedriagae was found.

The rock lizards of this area frequently show "panther patterns"... or tiger stripes...
A young Discoglossus, having completed its metamorphose – probably Discoglossus montalentii

We visited the Parc de Verghello (North of Vizzavona), a steep, forested mountain valley. There we tried to find Algyroides fitzingeri – successfully. This species is supposed to be rather rare on Corsica. But, probably it is frequently overlooked, due to its small size and its secretive behavior.
Algyroides fitzingeri...

...sometimes, it can be hard to spot these tiny lizards

Podarcis tiliguerta from Parc de Verghello
The obligatory orchid picture: Spiranthes aestivalis – a new species for us.

Due to its isolated geographic situation a lot of endemic species can be found on Corsica - like this meadow saffron (Colchicum corsicum)...

...or this butterfly (Coenonympha corinna) which only occurs on Corsica and Sardinia and Capraia island.
Hierophis viridiflavus, basking on the road

We expected the visit of the famous Restonica valley to be a fantastic experience: Driving with the car through this wild gorge up to 1400 m altitude and then start hiking into the wilderness of the mountains – and of course, the local rock lizards were supposed to be quite extraordinary… Reality was a little bit different: an endless convoy of cars trying to pass the narrow mountain road – traffic jam! The fee for the parking at the end of the road was 5 Euros. There, careful referrers assigned individual parking spaces to each car – paying attention that the limited parking space was used efficiently. Up there, the weather was cold and stormy and the mountains were covered by clouds. This didn’t deter the crowds of hikers from walking up the mountain trail in an endless human chain – the atmosphere resembled to a shopping mall at the last week-end before Christmas. At first, we courageously joined the hikers’ procession. But, as the sky became more and more cloudy we cancelled our hike half an hour later: Under these conditions, we wouldn’t see any rock lizards anyhow.

Next, we visited the Asco valley, another mountain gorge in the North. There, fewer tourists compared to Restonica. Above the Haut-Asco ski station we found rock lizards and Podarcis tiliguerta, again.

Presumably, September is not the optimal time to find amphibians. Hence we decided to start a night-excursion – hoping for salamanders. Possibly, we are not the greatest amphibian hunters… in any case, we didn’t succeed. At least we could watch several Tarentola mauritanica on the house walls in a nearby village (where also good pizza was served). This was the end of our mountain stay. The next morning we moved to the south-west coast at Propriano.
hiking destination for crowds of tourists...

Freezing Podarcis tiliguerta

Another endemic plant of Corsica: Narthecium reverchonii
Haut-Asco mountain scenery...

...home of Podarcis tiliguerta...

...and this Archaeolacerta bedriagae with decorative blue dots.
Dinner on the balcony of our Grand-Hotel in Corte

Result of a rather fruitless night excursion: Tarentola mauritanica – presumably, the picture quality could have been increased by activation of the red-eye reduction function...

Good morning, Corsica! – Let’s go south.
Whereas Archaeolacerta bedriagae seems to be almost omnipresent in the high altitudes of Haut Corse, only a few populations at the coast are known. At first, we followed a hint given by Jeroen – a place at the south coast near Bonifacio. Here, after a long search, we found a subadult and an adult specimen at exactly the rock formation Jeroen had described. In the nearby area we didn’t come across a single rock lizard despite there were plenty of suitable habitats. Should the rock lizards be so rare at the coast?

Later on, a stopover near Bonifacio brought Podarcis siculus which seems to be much rarer than Podarcis tiliguerta on Corsica. In the evening we had plenty of Tarentola mauritanica and Hemidactylus turcicus around our apartment.
...and an adult

At the south coast, Podarcis tiliguerta is more colourful than in the mountains

Another curious Podarcis tiliguerta
Podarcis siculus at an olive tree

Podarcis siculus is substantially bigger and more robust than Podarcis tiliguerta

Orthetrum brunneum(?) in love
Female Calopteryx haemorrhoidalis...

...and some males

Hemidactylus turcicus in the torch light
We checked another coastal section near Propriano and - to our surprise - we found a spot directly at the sea which was densely populated by Archaeolacerta bedriagae. These "sea lizards" were really impressive: very dark, frowning animals with stoic behavior. When they feel disturbed, they slowly walk away - actually they don't run -, disappear and don't come back. Completely different as the bustling and curious wall lizards.
This Archaeolacerta bedriagae lives up to its genus name...

A mini dragon...

...in full glory
The coastal specimen frequently showed blue colours on their tales.
And a more colourful specimen

All observations have to be documented accurately...

The Propriano area has coastal rocks as well as sandy beaches with dunes and marsh areas. Here, we searched for Natrix natrix corsa. Soon, we found one and even came across a nice Hierophis viridiflavus which tolerated being photographed in-situ. Hierophis viridiflavus seems to be common in this area – we saw several juveniles. Our search for Euleptes europea turned out to be more difficult. As we finally had found a juvenile and tried to get some pictures, this specimen lost its tale. We cannot recommend handling these fragile animals. After this experience we decided to cancel our search for Euleptes.
Dune vegetation: Glaucium flavum

Hierophis viridiflavus, sun-basking

Natrix natrix corsa
Juvenile Euleptes europaea

Juvenile Hierophis viridiflavus

Pancratium maritimum
We visited another rocky coastal section at the south-west coast and discovered that the complete area was densely populated by Archaeolacerta bedriagae. Obviously, this species may be more abundant at the coast as it seems. Presumably, the time of the day and weather conditions play a role if the lizards come out: an apparently uninhabited area can be full of rocks lizards some hours later and vice-versa. We don’t know which factors determine if they appear or not.
Archaeolacerta bedriagae...

...and another one

Coastal habitat
A subadult specimen...

...and a juvenile

Another nice juvenile
Having enough of the photographers...

This photo session was the end of our Corsica stay. In the morning of 16 September we went to Bastia airport. There, we had some fun with the friendly staff of the local car rental company (see below) and finally we left to Nice there we stayed for another night. After having explored the herpetological and commercial attractions of this city we took the plane back to Düsseldorf the next day.

Fieldherpers beware! On Corsica, the rentals cars have to be returned clean – that means: vacuum cleaned. If there is some dirt on the floor – like on this picture – it will cost 135 Euros. A great business model!
Au revoir, Corse

Nice:

Finally – shopping!
Herpetofauna Niceae: Tarentola mauritanica...

...and Podarcis muralis

Homo sapiens

The home of European lizards - by Birgit & Peter Oefinger!