

Brief Report on Steppe Vipers (Viperidae: *Vipera/Pelias*) and their New Findings in Azerbaijan



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Introduction

The steppe vipers of Azerbaijan were considered for many years as a subspecies of *V. u. renardi* Christoph, 1861 [1,2]. Subsequently, this subspecies was recognized as an independent species - *Vipera renardi* Christoph, 1861 [3,4]. According to the modern taxonomy of the ophidiofauna of the Caucasus [5], the taxonomic spectrum of the steppe vipers of Azerbaijan currently includes 3 species belonging to the genus of true vipers (*Vipera*) and the subgenus of corymbs (*Pelias*): 1. Eastern steppe viper (Steppe viper) *Vipera renardi* (Christoph, 1861), 2. Armenian viper - *Vipera eriwanensis* (Reuss, 1933), 3. Lotivi steppe viper *Vipera lotievi* [3]. The latter species was included in the list of poisonous snakes of Azerbaijan not long ago, after the discovery of this viper in 2016 in the northeastern part of the Greater Caucasus (Guba region) at an altitude of 1966 m above sea level [6].

Opinion

At the same time, two more species of steppe vipers are supposed to be present in Azerbaijan: *Vipera ebneri* (Knoepfner, Sochurek) and *Vipera dinniki* (Nikolsky). Unfortunately, the search for these species of vipers has not yet yielded positive results [7].

In Azerbaijan, steppe vipers are distributed in geographically limited areas and their numbers are low and rare. The habitat of *V. renardi* in Azerbaijan covers the central-northern and north-eastern parts (Figure 1) of the Greater Caucasus at an altitude of

700-1500m (Alekperov, Aliye). The Armenian viper *V. eriwanensis* in Azerbaijan occupies the mountain-steppe territories of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic (Shahbuz, Julfa and Ordubad regions, altitude 1500-2500m).

Recently, we have been able to identify new localities of *V. renardi* and *V. eriwanensis*. In Azerbaijan, localities of *V. renardi* are known along the southern macroslopes of the Greater Caucasus, mainly in the central and northern parts (Sheki, Shamakhi and Gobustan regions). We have identified new [8] finds in the areas of Shamakhi (village Zarat-Kheibar, N 40° 54'20", E 48° 32'09", height 1860m), Ismayilli (village Koydan, N 40° 53'35", E 48° 24'25", height 1564m) and Gubi (with Gyulazi, N 41° 11'01", E 48° 27'37", height 1650m). These findings indicate that the range of *V. renardi* continues in the northeast direction along the southern macroslopes of the Greater Caucasus, and the habitat rises even higher up to 1900m.

A new find of the viper *V. eriwanensis* has been discovered. Previously, the habitation of *V. eriwanensis* in the Kalbajar region (Karabakh) was assumed [1]. Not long ago (June 20, 2021) in the vicinity of the village of Seidlyar, Kalbajar region, at an altitude above sea level 1847m, *V. eriwanensis* was first identified (N 40° 11'22", E 46° 00'46", altitude above sea level 1847m). Thus, the range of the Armenian viper in Azerbaijan is wider than indicated in the literature [1,2].



Figure 1: New Findings of *Vipera renardi* (in the northeast, Guba region) and *Vipera eriwanensis* (in the west, Kelbejer region) in Azerbaijan.

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