



**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**  
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:



## Excursion to the cave of Gerani / Prefecture Réthymnon

### Leopard Snake (*Elaphe situla*)

The cave is located about 4 miles west of **Réthymnon** [Ρέθυμνο] towards **Chania** [Χανιά] where it was discovered during construction of the national road in 1967 directly beneath the bridge "Kyani Akti" at Gerani [Γεράνιον]. The natural cave entrance was hidden. *N. Apostolákis* from Gerani entered the Grotto first. He found the skeletons of two people. Likely, they died when the natural entrance was spilled in prehistoric times and they were locked in the cave. In 1969, *Ch. I. Makris* explored the Grotto. He found the natural cave entrance from the inside, while he followed the remains of "stairs" carved into the rock; the archaeologist dated the "staircase" construction in the Minoan era. It followed excavations by the "Management of Antiquities" from **Chania** and archaeological research by *E. Platákis* and the palaeontologist *M. Dermintzákis*; the latter discovered elephant bones in a grotto with impressive calcite formations (in the area of the natural cave entrance). This part of the cave is called also "elephant cave". Overall the cave consists of 5 consecutive spaces; the sixth room (the "elephant cave") is in parallel to the first. Overall, the cave area includes little more than 1,000 square meters. During the excavations was human and animal bones, pieces, and tools from stone and bone. The exhumed finds (stored partly in the Museum of **Réthymnon**) indicate that the cave was used since the end of Neolithic period and the "Great Mother Goddess cult" was practised in this cave sanctuary.

There is also a study of *A. Petrocheilou* to make the cave accessible to the public and for tourism - but in the foreseeable future whose implementation is not expected.

Located directly next to the cave entrance at the same mountain range (left), direction towards the coast, at about 300 m length, there are numerous rock niches which are very spacious inside and have Sinter- and Travertine formations. They serve goats as "place of refuge in bad weather".



Fig. left shows the cave entrance, which is backed up and "normally" closed with metal gates. The Middle figure and right show impressive travertine formations from the first and third room.

Photos: *H. Eikamp* (2003)



The figure left shows a greater rock niches (about 200 m left of cave entrance and 100 m from the coast) at the same range. The middle image shows a rock niche with beginning dripstone-and sinter formation inside. The right figure shows a view from this rock niche on the Bay at **Gerani**.

### Leopard Snake (*Elaphe situla*)

There are 3 amphibian and 14 reptile species, including 4 snake species on Crete. The **European Cat Snake** (appears at Crete with its own sub-species (*Telescopus fallax* subsp. *pallidus*)). The snake is a venomous species, but it is considered no threat to humans because it is rear-fanged and does not possess the ability to deliver the venom to humans. The other 3 snake species among the true adder and are therefore non-toxic and harmless; those are the **Dice snake** (*Natrix tessellata*), the **Balkan rage snake** (*Coluber laurenti*) and the **Leopard Snake** (*Elaphe situla*). Last one is if its brick-red spots probably one of the most beautiful snakes in Europe and very often found at Crete.



**Leopard snake** on the road; image detail above is plainly showing the brick-red spots.

Photo: U. Kluge (2003)

Habitats of **Leopard Snake** are dry Rocky slopes, gravel-and pile of stone. It is active at day and twilight with a length up to 1 meter. It usually tries to flee when “surprised”; but if it doesn’t have this capability, it can also strongly bite. Its food consists of mice and small birds, rarely bigger insects. The mating season is May-June. The Oviposition occurs in July-August; the clutch consists of 2 to 5 eggs. The necessary breeding temperature is 24-27 degrees C; the slack duration is 60-70 days. Dormancy of line is 2-3 months.



Clutch of *E. situla*

Translated by Michael Bloechinger-Daeumling

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At this point literature tips on the subject palaeontology and nature conservancy (Author H. Eikamp, et. al.) from the NAOM Publishing House

