

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

## Minoan settlement **Gournia** / North-east Crete

### Dice snake, *Natrix tessellata*



The ruins of the ancient settlement **Gournia** are about 12 miles south-east of **Agios Nikolaos**, immediate (right) at the North-coast road towards **Sitia**. The ancient name of the place is not known. Today's name "**Gournia**" comes from the Greek word "trough"; derived from stone- and wood pools that were found at the beginning of the excavation (1901-1904 by H. A. Boyd). The settlement comes from the mid to late Minoan period (1700 - 1400 BC), but was already used as a settlement place in the Neolithic (around 2800 BC).

The ruins of the former "City" are crossed by narrow, "cobblestone" streets, just wide enough for pack animals. The foundations of the houses indicate single room buildings. Remains of the houses are grouped around a square and at the highest point of the hill was a "Palace". Although Gournia with about 15,000 square meters seem to be a small town, it on the other hand probably had great strategic importance for ancient trade (because to its proximity to the sea). Here probably the goods were "transhipped", to transport from sea overland up to South Crete, rather than to circumnavigate the dangerous Cape of Sideros. Visitors here learn about the more "practical" than the "artistic" side of the Minoans. There probably were, alongside living and handcraft areas, also warehouse- and Palace areas but strictly separated.

The archaeological finds from the excavation period are kept in the Archaeological Museum in Heraklion, the site is daily open from 9.00 a.m. - 3.00 p.m. and to visit for a fee of 2 € (per person).



Total view of the "city hill" of **Gournia** seen from the North (from the sea).

**Picture:** U. Kluge (2004)



## Dice snake, *Natrix tessellata*

The dice snake is found on Crete only regional limited because by its way of life it's bound to particular habitat types (rivers and lakes). Is to find only at specific locations and thus one of the rarest of the 4 snake species on Crete (see also leaflet No. 015-04/E: Leopard snake). The best known occurrence of the dice snake is about 30 miles east of Chania, on the only sweet water lake of the island, the Kournas Lake at the foot of the Lefka Ori. The Lake has a diameter of about 1 mile and a deep of up to 45 metres. It is fed by underground springs.

The touristic untouched shore areas of Kournas Lake are the dice snake habitat.

The dice snake belongs to the genus of water snake and reaches a length of 75-100 cm. Its body colour varies in many grey-, brown- and green tones, the bottom line is brightly coloured. "Dice-like" spots are arranged in longitudinal rows on the back. It mainly feeds on small fish, but also frogs and newts are on its diet. The diurnal snake mainly stays in water and can dive 20 minutes (and longer). Its going ashore for the winter rest and the egg laying. Mating occurs between June - August; it lays 5 - 25 oval eggs; the slippage of Cubs is 4-6 after. If the snake feels threatened, it aspirates sibilants and sometimes performs mock assaults. In addition it can give a foul smelling secretion of and play "dead". The non-toxic dice snake is considered extremely "biting lazy".



Whether in the water (figure left), overhead (fig. middle) or in the bank vegetation (right figure), the dice snake feels only comfortable in and near the water. Its preys are (as the snake itself) "bound to the water"; protecting and preserving of these habitats are indispensable for the survival of this species on Crete.

