

**The Eastern spadefoot Toad (*Pelobates syriacus*) :**  
**A new amphibian species for Lebanon**  
**The international expedition of herpetological research**  
**in South Lebanon, April 2005**

Francois Tron, A Rocha France, 22/8/2005

A Rocha Lebanon and A Rocha France organised a herpetological expedition in South Lebanon from the 17th to the 28th April 2005. The team of researchers was made up of three French, two English and one Lebanese, associates from the A Rocha network (including two volunteers), the Lebanese universities (American University of Beirut and the Université du Liban) and the EPHE laboratory of Biological and Ecological Vertebrates, Montpellier II.

The expedition targeted the rediscovery of a primitive species of frog, which has been thought to be extinct for fifty years: *Discoglossus nigriventer* (Levantine Painted Frog). Seen only twice in the Hula Valley, Israel, in 1940 and 1950, the Levantine Painted Frog is the only member of the Discoglossidae family in the East Mediterranean. Even though the rivers, which feed into the Hula are sourced in the Hasbani Valley in South Lebanon, the area has never undergone scientific research.

However, in 2000 a scientist from A Rocha Lebanon saw a frog, which could have belonged to this species on their site, *the Aammiq marsh*. To the south of the Bekka valley, these marshes are 150km north of Hula and are made up of natural habitats which are similar to those that were in the Hula wetlands before its agricultural reclamation. The area had been designated as a natural reserve, thanks to the work of A Rocha Lebanon with the support of the MedWetCoast project through working with landowners and the ministry of environment. The management plan put in place has already allowed some ecological restoration to take place, and the site is in the course of full rehabilitation.

The expedition in April 2005 was the second of its kind: the first was in 2004 and was also organised jointly by A Rocha Lebanon and A Rocha France. This year still no positive proof of the existence of *Discolgossus nigriventer* could be found. However the batrachological results have been very encouraging. In fact, two reproduction sites of the Eastern Spadefoot Toad (*Pelobates syriacus*) have been found, which are the first two positive records of the species in Lebanon. Over 80 sites have been surveyed during 2004 and 2005, producing over 1000 data from 5 amphibian species.

The partnership, which developed between A Rocha Lebanon and the national universities, has created the opportunity to develop a strategy which is shared between the different partners so as to continue the herpetological research and contribute to the conservation of the Lebanese wetlands.