AMENDMENTS TO APPENDICES I AND II OF THE CONVENTION

A. PROPOSAL

Inclusion of Vipera ursinii in Appendix I.

B. PROPONENT

The French Republic and the Italian Republic.

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxonomy

11. Class: Reptilia

12. Order: Squamata - Serpentes

13. Family: Viperidae

14. Species: Vipera ursinii (Bonaparte, 1835)

15. Common Names: English: Orsini's viper/meadow viper
French: vipère d'Orsini
Spanish Vibora de Orsini
Italian: Vipera di Orsini

16. Code Numbers:

2. Biological Data

21. Distribution: Four subspecies, distribution is patchy, often found in relict populations (Saint-Girons, 1978):

Vipera ursinii ursinii (Bonaparte, 1835), from South-Eeast France, central highlands of Italy, South-West Yugoslavia (Krk Island), Albania and South-West Turkey.

Vipera ursinii rakosiensis Méhéli, 1894, from Austria (extinct), Hungary, northern Yugoslavia (?), northern Bulgaria and southern Romania (probably extinct).

Vipera ursinii ebneri (= V.u. eruvanensis) Knoepffler and Sochurek, 1955, from North-East Turkey and the Soviet Union (central Caucasus and Turkestan).

Vipera ursinii renardi (Christoph, 1861), from Romania (Danube Delta), the Soviet Union (from Bressarabia and the Ukraine to the Caucasus and Armenia) and Turkey (northeastern Anatolia).

22. Population:

Vipera ursinii ursinii

Populations are small, scattered, localized and reported to be declining in France and Italy. Krk (Yugoslavia), Albania, South-West Turkey: status unknown to proponent.

Reasons for decline in France: development of the species' habitat as tourist resorts; clearing of habitat as grazing area; killing on sight by farmers and tourists; overcollecting; over-use of biocides.

Reasons for decline in Italy: habitat destruction for ski-resorts, tourist facilities, and economic exploitation of pastures; increasing activity by tourists; captures for commercial purposes; wanton killing (Honegger, 1981).

Vipera ursinii rakosiensis

Austria: almost extinct.

Hungary: endangered, localized populations, decreasing rapidly.

Yugoslavia (Slovenia): unknown whether a population survives.

Bulgaria: unknown to proponent.

Romania: all are now considered to be extinct (see also St. Vancea et. al. 1985).

Reasons for decline: lowering of the water table; habitat alterations, mainly due to agricultural development and drainage of the Danube Plain; forestry (Hungary); over-collecting; wanton killing (everywhere); increase of mono cultures (destruction of food insects); flooding of the weakened population around Laxenburg (Austria).

During the last century, high bounties were given for each viper killed (Honegger, 1981).

Vipera ursinii ebneri

Turkey and USSR: the status of the populations is unknown to proponent. Saint-Girons (1978) stipulated that, at least in parts of its distribution area, it is doubtlessly in the course of extinction.

Vipera ursinii renardi

Romania: the Danube Delta population is isolated, scattered and gradually disappearing or perhaps already extinct.

USSR and Turkey: unknown to proponent.

23. Habitat:

Vipera ursinii ursinii

Montane/subalpine meadows and grasslands between 1400 and 2400 m., usually associated with dense pigmy juniper (Juniperus nana) growth.

Vipera ursinii rakosiensis

Lowland meadows, low-lying (120-200 m.), mesic grasslands (grass steppe), sometimes with bushes; occasionally dunes, pastures with low cattle density. The presence of dry sandy habitat is always required.

Vipera ursinii ebneri

Montane and open areas at various altitudes, at least up to 2700 m. It has been suggested that there are three forms, one form for the North-West steppes, one for the South-East steppes and a subalpine form (Saint-Girons, 1978).

Vipera ursinii renardi

The eastern steppe form requires sandy plains with reeds and steppe, extending into hilly and mountainous regions (Honegger, 1981).

3. Trade Data

31. National Utilization: The species has been heavily collected, persecuted and killed, both in the past and in the present. Brenner (1939) reports killings of 500-1000 specimens in one day in Austria. Specimens of this inoffensive snake are still regularly killed by the public on sight. In the last century, this killing has been encouraged by offering money for dead specimens.

32. Legal International Trade: No actual trade data are available to proponent, but the small snake is quite harmless and popular with vivarium keepers and reptile collectors. It is easy to transport specimens of the species and it is known, although not published, that collection of specimens from the wild occurs.

33. Illegal Trade: Not known to proponent, but doubtlessly exists (see 32).

34. Potential Trade Threats: Vipers are very popular among European terrarium keepers and there seems to be a steady drain on wild populations, especially of rare and exotic species. The meadow viper is small, easy to handle and quite harmless. Many populations are small and their distribution is scattered. Most collecting in western Europe is done at a small number of easily accessible sites. Commercial collection on a large scale could eradicate an entire population at once.

4. Protection Status

41. National:

France: strictly protected under Statute 76629 (1976) and Decree 77.1295 (1977).

Italy: no specific legislation for the species. Restricting hunting and collecting regulations exist for populations occurring in Abruzzo National Park and in State forests.

Yugoslavia: not protected, protection under consideration in Slovenia.

Albania: not protected.

Turkey: no nominal protection; the country, however, signed the Berne Convention.

Austria: nominally protected in all Austrian States where it occurs. Enforcement varies greatly. Biogenetic reserve for V. u. rakosiensis has been proposed to Council of Europe (Corbett, in litt., 1986).

Hungary: nominally protected. Occurring in Kiskunsagi National Park and in Hansag Reserve.

Bulgaria: nominally protected.

Romania: not protected.

Soviet Union: occurring in USSR Red Data Book, hence protected.

42. International: The species is included in Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats of 1979 (the Berne Convention).

43. Additional Protection Needs: Education of the public and strict protection of its habitat, including prevention from collecting, even for scientific purposes, is immediately required to ensure survival in large parts of the species' area.

5. Information on Similar Species

6. Comments from Countries of Origin

7. Additional Remarks

8. References

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