

Climate change and the fate of endemic Beyşehir Frog, *Pelophylax caralitanus*

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*Abstract.***—Global warming and the decline in precipitation threaten wetlands worldwide, and lakes in some regions are in the process of drying. Amphibians, since they are water-dependent, will be the creatures most affected by the rapid habitat losses due to climate change. Especially for amphibian species which are endemic, the situation will be more serious in terms of its impact on biodiversity. Therefore, in this study, we determined the climate characteristics specifc to the habitats of an endemic amphibian species,** *Pelophylax caralitanus***. According to the Representative Concentration Pathways (RCP) climate change scenarios of the ICPP, we analyzed whether the climatic characteristics specifc to these habitats will exist in 2050 and 2070 under the criteria of RCP 2.6, RCP 4.5, RCP 6.0, and RCP 8.5. The results are quite alarming for** *Pelophylax caralitanus***. According to the RCP climate change scenarios, the climatic conditions in the present habitats of this endemic amphibian species will not remain stable in that the potential habitats in Southwestern Anatolia will be dramatically reduced and the appropriate habitats of** *P. caralitanus* **around the Turkish Lake District will completely disappear, while some new potential habitats will emerge in the Northwest Aegean region of Turkey.**

Keywords. Amphibian, climate change scenarios, habitat loss, MaxEnt, RCP, Representative Concentration Pathways, Turkey

Citation: Kıraç A, Gidiş M, Mert A, Başkale E. 2022. Climate change and the fate of endemic Beyşehir Frog, *Pelophylax caralitanus. Amphibian & Reptile Conservation* 16(1) [General Section]: 76–85 (e303).

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Accepted: 7 November 2020; **Published:** 31 March 2022

Introduction

The Beyşehir Frog, *Pelophylax caralitanus*, is an endemic species of Turkey which is distributed across the Mediterranean region of Turkey called the Turkish Lake District (Arikan et al. 1994; Ayaz et al. 2006; Baskale et al. 2017; Düşen et al. 2004; Kaya et al. 2002). According to the literature on the distribution of *P. caralitanus*, it inhabits permanent wetlands with rich aquatic vegetation, including permanent ponds, rain pools, streams, rivers, and irrigation channels. *Pelophylax caralitanus* prefers abundant vegetation around lakes and ponds as habitats (Başkale and Çapar 2016). In particular, emergent vegetation present in the water and the presence of bushes and weeds around the water body constitute an ideal area for the release of eggs and seeking shelter from predators. *Pelophylax caralitanus* is listed by IUCN as Near Threatened (NT) because of ongoing threats from habitat loss and overexploitation (Öz et al. 2009). Since it has a relatively wide distribution and presumed large populations, it is unlikely to experience declines that are

rapid enough to qualify it for listing in a higher Red List category.

Climate change is one of the greatest problems threatening biodiversity and ecosystems in the $21st$ century, leading to the extinction of many species (Sinervo et al. 2010; Walther et al. 2002). The habitat preferences of amphibians are closely related to temperature, precipitation, and wetlands, so amphibians are one of the most sensitive animal groups to changes in climatic conditions (Enriquez-Urzelai et al. 2019; Ortiz-Yusty et al. 2013). Temperature was found to be positively correlated with the detection probability of *P. caralitanus* (Başkale and Çapar 2016). Wetland ecosystems, in which amphibians complete their life cycles, are among the areas most affected by climate change, which creates inhospitable conditions for amphibian reproduction (Desta et al. 2012; Hopkins 2007). According to the literature, the losses of amphibian habitat will be high due to the increase in annual temperatures in the Mediterranean basin, and it is predicted that there will be new gains in the north (Araújo et al. 2006). In addition to the diffculties amphibians face from possible climatic changes, the pathogens that cause amphibian deaths, such as *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* in the southern part of the world, have been detected with increasing frequency in the north due to climate change (Berger et al. 1998; Cohen et al. 2019; Erismis et al. 2014).

The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), which has been investigating climate change for 30 years, presented new climate change scenarios under the name of "Representative Concentration Pathways" (RCP) in its *Fifth Assessment Report* (IPCC 2014). These scenarios estimate that global warming will change atmospheric CO_2 concentrations by 2100 to levels of 1,370 ppm for the RCP 8.5 scenario, 850 ppm for RCP 6.0, 650 ppm for RCP 4.5, and 490 ppm for RCP 2.6. These scenarios predict that temperatures in the world may increase by anywhere from 1.5 °C to 5.8 °C (IPCC 2014).

It is important to know the climatic requirements of a species in order to predict how that species will respond to climate change. The MaxEnt approach and software have been widely used in recent years to determine the current climatic demands of a species and to predict changes in that species' habitats in the future (Hendrick and McGarvey 2019; Kıraç and Mert 2019; Untalan et al. 2019; Zhang et al. 2018). MaxEnt gives more accurate results with less data in smaller areas compared to other methods, e.g., DOMAIN, BIOCLIM, and GARP (Hernandez et al. 2006; Wisz et al. 2008). In addition, MaxEnt allows categorized and continuous data to be processed together (Phillips et al. 2006; Phillips and Dudík 2008) and it creates habitat suitability maps in addition to the outcome outputs (Elith et al. 2006, 2011; Hernandez et al. 2006, 2008).

The aim of this study is to investigate the ecological niche of *P. caralitanus* and evaluate the consistency and variations in the predicted potential distributions of this endemic species in the Turkish Lake District in the Southwest of Turkey under the IPCC's four future climate scenarios (RCP 2.6, RCP 4.5, RCP 6.0, and RCP 8.5). The results will help us to understand how this endemic amphibian species will experience the effects of climate change in relation to distributional shifts.

Materials and Methods

Study site. The Turkish Lake District (Fig. 1) is located in Southwest Turkey and includes the western part of the Taurus Mountains. This region contains many different tectonic water bodies such as Beyşehir Lake, Eğirdir Lake, Burdur Lake, Akşehir Lake, Salda Lake, and Acıgöl Lake. The Turkish Lake District is a transitional region between the Mediterranean and continental climates (Baskale et al. 2017; Düşen et al. 2004).

Fig. 1. Turkish Lake District and species presence data.

Data collection. Presence data for *P. caralitanus* were recorded from 89 sites in the Turkish Lake District area based on our feld studies performed between 2010 and 2016, as well as previously published papers (i.e., Ayaz et al. 2006; Başkale and Çapar 2016; Baskale et al. 2017; Düşen et al. 2004; Kaya et al. 2002) (Fig. 1). The sampling sites and their coordinates are given in Appendix 1. Sampling from habitats during this study was approved by the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and Natural Parks in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Turkey (protocol number 18.10.2010/61288) and the Animal Care and Use Committee at Pamukkale University (protocol number 20.09.2010-PAUHDEK-2010/021). Individuals of the target species were identifed in their natural habitats and were not exposed to stress. No measurements or experiments were performed on the species.

Bioclimatic data. The current bioclimatic data (Bio1 to Bio19, for years 1950–2000) were downloaded from version 1.4 (30 arc-sec, or \sim 1 km) of the WorldClim website (http://worldclim.org, Hijmans et al. 2005). The varible defnitions are given in Table 1. In Version 1.4, HadGEM2-ES (30 arc-sec, or \sim 1 km) based data for 19 bioclimatic variables were available for the future (2050 and 2070) climate projections based on the RCP 2.6, RCP 4.5, RCP 6.0, and RCP 8.5 scenarios. These data sets are provided on a global scale, and were optimized to the size of Turkey with the help of ArcGIS 10.2 and converted to ASCII format.

Habitat suitability model. Due to the narrow study area, high correlations can exist between bioclimatic

variables which may pose a problem during the analysis. To eliminate the problem of multi-collinearity, we applied Pearson Correlation Analysis ($r^2 < 0.8$) for the 19 bioclimatic variables. If a pair of variables has a correlation coefficient of greater than 0.8, they were considered to both represent a similar phenomenon, so one of the pair of variables was excluded from the analysis.

MaxEnt 3.4.1 software was used to estimate the climatic conditions limiting the current distribution of *P. caralitanus* and to compare the current situation with future climate scenarios (Phillips et al. 2017). The presence data of *P. caralitanus* in CSV format were entered into the "Samples" section of MaxEnt 3.4.1 software. The current bioclimatic data in ASCII format were entered into the "Environmental layers" section. Then, 2050 and 2070 bioclimatic data fles (RCP 2.6, RCP 4.5, RCP 6.0, and RCP 8.5) were entered in the "Projection layers directory/ fle" section to compare the future scenarios. MaxEnt analysis was run using 90% of the records as training data to build the model and the remaining 10% for testing the model. Ten repetitions were made for each model so that different training and test data would be processed in the analysis. Any bioclimatic variables (Bio1 to Bio19) that did not contribute to the model obtained as a result of the analysis, were excluded in the next analysis. Replicated run type Crossvalidate was selected for the analysis along with the settings: maximum iterations 500, convergence threshold 0.00001, log fle maxent.log, and the default prevalence was set to 0.5. The analysis process continued until the best model was obtained. We used the "Area under the receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curves" (AUC) values to determine the best

Table 1. Bioclimatic variables obtained from the WorldClim website (http://worldclim.org).

| Code | Bioclimatic variables | Unit |
|------------------|--|-------------|
| Bio1 | Annual Mean Temperature | $\rm ^{o}C$ |
| Bio2 | Mean Diurnal Range (Mean of monthly (max temp - min temp)) | $\rm ^{o}C$ |
| Bio3 | Isothermality ($(Bio2/Bio7) * 100$) | unitless |
| Bio ₄ | Temperature Seasonality (standard deviation *100) | C of V |
| Bio5 | Max Temperature of Warmest Month | $\rm ^{o}C$ |
| Bio ₆ | Min Temperature of Coldest Month | $\rm ^{o}C$ |
| Bio7 | Temperature Annual Range (Bio5-Bio6) | $\rm ^{o}C$ |
| Bio ₈ | Mean Temperature of Wettest Quarter | $\rm ^{o}C$ |
| Bio9 | Mean Temperature of Driest Quarter | $\rm ^{o}C$ |
| Bio10 | Mean Temperature of Warmest Quarter | $\rm ^{o}C$ |
| Bio11 | Mean Temperature of Coldest Quarter | $\rm ^{o}C$ |
| Bio12 | Annual Precipitation | mm |
| Bio13 | Precipitation of Wettest Month | mm |
| Bio14 | Precipitation of Driest Month | mm |
| Bio15 | Precipitation Seasonality (Coefficient of Variation) | CofV |
| Bio16 | Precipitation of Wettest Quarter | mm |
| Bio17 | Precipitation of Driest Quarter | mm |
| Bio18 | Precipitation of Warmest Quarter | mm |
| Bio19 | Precipitation of Coldest Quarter | mm |

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Fig. 2. Variables with the highest contributions to the potential distribution of *P. caralitanus* according to MAXENT with the standard errors in blue. The Y-axis indicates the probability of presence (based on the Cloglog, or complementary log-log transform, values) and the X-axis shows the contribution of each variable.

model performance. An AUC value close to 1 indicates that the model is in a perfect performance and a value of 0.7 or higher indicates that the model is descriptive, while a value of 0.5 indicates that the model does not provide useful information (Phillips et al. 2006). Among the models with the highest AUC values, the one with the lowest standard deviation was selected as the best model.

Results

The results of the analysis indicate that the AUC value of the training data is 0.965, while the test data AUC value is 0.964, and the standard deviation is 0.012. We

found that the climatic factors limiting the distribution of *P. caralitanus* were: Bio4 (percent contribution: 22.3%, Temperature Seasonality), Bio6 (16.4%, Min Temperature of Coldest Month), Bio7 (17.9%, Temperature Annual Range), Bio8 (19.9%, Mean Temperature of Wettest Quarter), Bio14 (15.5%, Precipitation of Driest Month), and Bio17 (8%, Precipitation of Driest Quarter). According to these results, *P. caralitanus* prefers habitats with precipitation in the driest months, and those where the average temperature of the coldest three months does not fall below -5 *°*C, the seasonal temperature difference is high, and the humid months are $0-5$ °C (Fig. 2).

The habitats for *P. caralitanus* were primarily in

Fig. 3. Current climatic habitat suitability map **(A)** and the eight RCP climatic change scenario maps for *P. caralitanus* based on RCP 2.6 **(B–C)**, RCP 4.5 **(D–E)**, RCP 6.0 **(F–G)**, and RCP 8.5 **(H–I)** for either 2050 or 2070 as indicated.

Southwestern Anatolia, in the region between Central Anatolia and Western Anatolia, and around the western Taurus Mountains (Fig. 3A). A large part of the map refects the distribution areas of *P. caralitanus* reported in the literature. Although its presence has not yet been reported from the new potential areas, these areas are climatically potential habitats.

If the RCP 2.6 scenario occurs, there will be habitat losses in the Turkish Lake District until 2050, potential habitats in the Southwest will persist, and new potentially suitable bioclimatic habitats will emerge in the North Aegean region (Fig. 3B). By 2070, the situation in the Turkish Lake District will be slightly better than in 2050 and new potential habitats will be formed in a small area in the inner Western Aegean region (Fig. 3C). In the case of the RCP 4.5 scenario, suitable habitats in the Turkish Lake District will almost disappear, new habitats will appear in the Northern Aegean regions, and potential habitats in the Southwest will persist (Fig. 3D–E). The

RCP 6.0 scenario map shows that a situation similar to the RCP 4.5 scenario in Fig. 3E will occur in 2050, but it reveals that the situation will be worse in 2070 (Fig. 3F–G). According to the RCP 8.5 scenario, which is the most dramatic result, potential habitats in Southwestern Anatolia will be reduced but some will continue to exist, and the appropriate habitats of *P. caralitanus* around the Turkish Lake District will completely disappear. On the other hand, new potential habitats not seen in the other scenarios will emerge in the Northwest Aegean region (Fig. 3H–I).

Discussion

Recent studies have provided important information on the extinctions of species due to climate change. Studies have reported that there could be a 15–37% loss of species by 2050 according to various climate change scenarios (Thomas et al. 2004). Even in the most optimistic climate change scenario, most of these losses will occur in endemic species (Dirnböck et al. 2011). In response to climate change, many species will present compensating mechanisms such as adaptation and migration; however, the success of these mechanisms against climate change will be related to the climate change velocity. In contrast to species which have large areas of distribution, endemic species distributed in a narrow region according to special climatic and topographic conditions will not be as successful, except in areas with a low climate change velocity. In areas with a high climate change velocity, endemism is either very low or does not exist. For this reason low climate change velocity areas will be essential refuges for many small-ranged species, such as endemic species (Sandel et al. 2011).

The current habitat suitability map (Fig. 3A) shows the distribution of *P. caralitanus* mainly in the Turkish Lake District region and is compatible with species observation data. It also indicates that there are suitable habitats for this species in the north-western parts of the Turkish Lake District (Fig. 3A), while recent studies have found that the most north-western distribution area of the species is Acıgöl and Işıklı Lakes (Baskale et al. 2017). These lakes are located at the north-western border of the Turkish Lake District. Although there are locations with similar climatic conditions, the distribution of the species in the northern part is geographically isolated due to mountains.

In the past two decades, some lakes in the Turkish Lake District have reduced water levels due to climatic changes (Göncü et al. 2017; Kantarcı 2008). Wetlands and lakes are the essential elements of the habitats of frog species such as *P. caralitanus* because they need water bodies to complete their life cycle. A signifcant reduction of snow in higher regions due to climate change, a reduction in the water storage basins and earlier melting of snow will have negative consequences for many wetlands in Turkey (Yılmaz et al. 2019). Potential distribution maps determined for *P. caralitanus* can help in prioritizing the planning of future wetland use management around the current populations, the discovery of new populations or the identifcation of top priority areas.

According to RCP scenarios that were created here for *P. caralitanus*, the climate change velocity will be high for the next 30 to 50 years (Fig. 3B–I), and habitat loss and fragmentation will be quite high in the distribution area of the species. For the survival of endemic species, we found RCP 2.6 to be the most optimistic scenario among the climate scenarios. However, even in this scenario, if *P. caralitanus* cannot migrate to the northwestern Turkish Lake District, the distribution of the species will shrink in the next 30 years, and a very narrow distribution area will host the species in 2070*.* The IPCC, which is currently in its $6th$ assessment phase, reported "Global warming of 1.5 °C" towards the end of 2018, and emphasized that a temperature rise by 1.5 °C was better than 2 °C (IPCC 2018). According to our

results, if the RCP 2.6 scenario is exceeded, most smallscale wetlands will begin to dry in the next 30 years, and irreversible changes may occur in the following years relative to the current distribution map of *P. caralitanus* (Fig. 3D–I). Although new locations with similar climate zones occur in the north and north-west of the Turkish Lake District, it would be very difficult for the frogs to migrate from the original habitats to the new climatically suitable habitats within the next 30 and 50 years because of geographic isolation. Moreover, if the RCP 8.5 climate scenario occurs, there will be no climatically suitable habitats for *P. caralitanus* in the Turkish Lake District, which we can categorize as a disaster.

We have shown that the MaxEnt model is a useful tool for creating a predictive distribution map of *P. caralitanus* in the Turkish Lake District, and it has allowed us to determine putative environmental constraints and successfully predict the species potential fate in the coming years. According to our results, *P. caralitanus* will move farther towards extinction in future, in the face of such problems as an increase in temperature, decrease in precipitation, loss of habitat, and reduction of water bodies. In order to ensure the continuation of this endemic species, the protection of habitat and the impact of climate change on the species should be investigated in detail with more environmentalist approaches.

*Acknowledgements***.—**This research was supported by Pamukkale University Scientifc Research Projects Unit- BAP (Project No: 2010BSP017). The permissions for feld work and handling of the frogs were issued by the Animal Ethics Committee of Pamukkale University (Pamukkale, Turkey) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Nature Conservation and Natural Parks (Ankara, Turkey).

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Climate change and *Pelophylax caralitanus*

Appendix 1. The list of localities of *Pelophylax caralitanus* in this survey.

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