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POPULATION STRUCTURE OF TWO SYNTOPIC SPADEFOOT TOADS (GENUS *PELOBATES*) AT THE LIMIT OF THEIR RANGES

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The spadefoot toads (*Pelobates* spp.) are highly specialized burrowing and nocturnal species with a narrow ecological niche. Two related species occur in Southeastern Europe (*P. syriacus* and *P. fuscus*). While their ranges are mostly disjoint, they overlap in the Balkan Peninsula, along the lower course of the Danube and the western coast of the Black Sea. Both species reach the limits of their ranges here: southern limit for *P. fuscus* and northern limit for *P. syriacus*. We studied syntopic populations in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserver (Romania), on Grindul Lupilor, a natural sand levee (44°37'N, 28°48'E), where *P. syriacus* populations are considerably larger and have a wider distribution than *P. fuscus* ones. The two populations differed significantly in size and body mass (ratio *fuscus*: *syriacus*: SVL females 0.7, males 0.63; Body mass females 0.26, males 0.21), and showed distinct sexual dimorphism with females significantly larger in *P. fuscus*, and males slightly larger than the females in *P. syriacus*. The animals differed also in age structure: *P. fuscus* had on average 2.7 years (range 2-4 years), while *P. syriacus* had on average 4.6 years (range 2-7 years). Both species reached sexual maturity at 2 years of age, suggesting important differences in growth rate and better competitive abilities in *P. syriacus*.