

A case of cannibalism in *Podarcis muralis* from Dorset, England

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The common wall lizard (*Podarcis muralis*) is the most widespread species of the genus *Podarcis* in Europe, ranging from Iberia to the Balkan peninsula. Moreover, it has been introduced into Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and even north America (Speybroeck et al., 2016). It is a small-sized lacertid, reaching a total of 22 cm in length, with a rather polymorphic brown to green pattern (Sacchi et al., 2013). Like most *Podarcis* spp., it feeds mainly on arthropods (Bombi & Bologna, 2002), but also on gastropods, annelids, small vertebrates, and plants (Barbault & Mou, 1986). It may also consume other lizards, when they are smaller than themselves, as evidenced by the predation of a *Zootoca vivipara* by an adult male *P. muralis* in Britain (Thomas et al., 2020). Here we report a case of cannibalism

that took place in Boscombe cliffs, Dorset (50° 43'15.7" N, 1° 49'29.6" W). According to Michaelides et al. (2015), this population results from a secondary introduction (from a naturalised non-native English population) of Venetian origin (Bologna, Italy).

On 23rd August 2020 at 13:09 h, an adult male was observed preying a juvenile conspecific. The juvenile was basking on a rock wall when, suddenly, a large male approached and seized it by the left hindleg and tail (Fig. 1A). The captured lizard, trying to defend itself, bit the left eye of the male (Fig. 1B&C) which responded by thrashing its head, left and right, causing the release from the juvenile bite (Fig. 1D). The adult male retreated to a more secluded spot where he finished ingesting the young lacertid backwards (tail first;

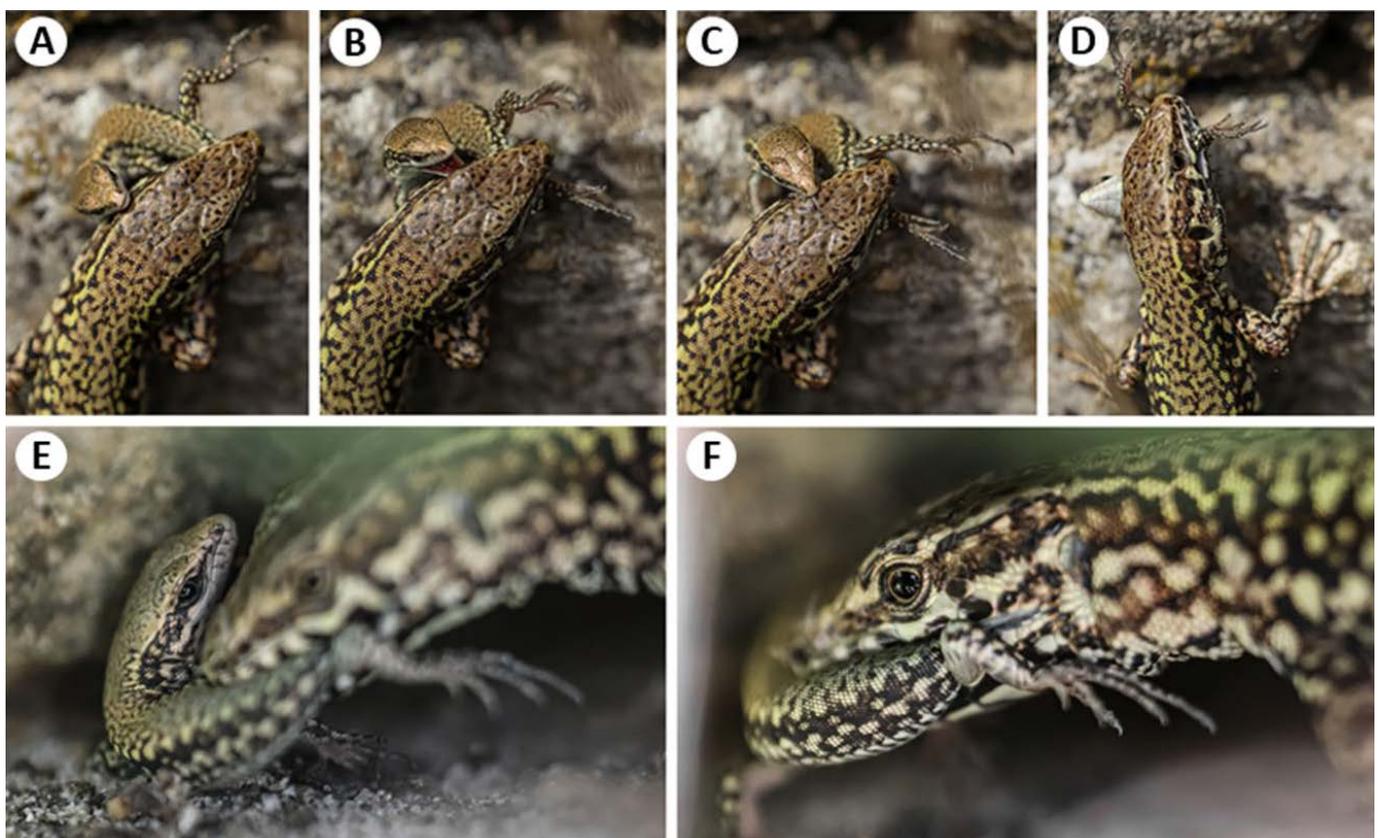


Figure 1. A large male *Podarcis muralis* capturing a juvenile conspecific- **A.** The male grabbing the juvenile by the left posterior leg and tail, **B.** & **C.** The juvenile trying to defend itself by biting the left eye of the male, which responded by thrashing its head, left and right, **D.** The juvenile has released its bite, **E.** & **F.** The male attempting to better position the juvenile for ingestion. The adult male subsequently, retreated to a hidden spot on the rock wall

Fig.1E-F). Several other individuals of the common wall lizard were seen in the area, including adult males and females, subadults and juveniles.

Cannibalism has been observed in several species of *Podarcis*, normally with adult individuals preying on juveniles, but also on adult tails, adult corpses and even eggs; this is the case for *Podarcis liolepis* (Castilla & van Damme, 1996), *Podarcis siculus* (Capula & Aloise, 2011; Grano & Cattaneo, 2011), *Podarcis virescens* (Dias et al., 2016) and *Podarcis erhardii* (Madden & Brock, 2018). It seems that cannibalism has only been observed infrequently in *P. muralis* (Žagar & Carretero, 2012; Simović & Marković, 2013).

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