

NOTES ON BREEDING LILFORD'S WALL LIZARD (*PODARCIS LILFORDI*) IN CAPTIVITY

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My first encounter with this stunning lizard was over 20 years ago. It was in a mixed collection of lacertids belonging to a school friend. The striking coal black and royal blue livery stood out amongst the usual green and brown of the other occupants. Not knowing, caring or being aware of the scientific name at the time, I and many others knew this beauty as the "Spanish Black".

A hardy ground dwelling lizard, it originates from the sparsely vegetated rocky islets around the coasts of Majorca and Minorca, Spanish Balearic Islands. Some forms of *lilfordi* are green or brown in colour, but most — and the more spectacular — are melanistic or partially melanistic.

Although not so large as some of its relatives, (its maximum length snout to vent is approximately 8cms) a fully grown male in full breeding trim is indeed an impressive sight. Raised up high on its forelegs, the deep blue throat puffed out to its maximum and the head cocked in the direction of a male adversary, it almost pins the subordinate into submission with its piercing stare. Only the slow side to side weaving of its tail (like a cat about to pounce on a mouse) gives a clue to the tension about to explode. It is this deep rooted territoriality that ensures that a mixed group of these lizards in spring and summer will rarely be at rest. Females also may be drawn into the day to day dramas.

Recently, space and time allowed me to re-live those early days spent engrossed in the antics of a vivarium full of lacertas, so I acquired a small group of "Spanish Blacks". It was early summer, so food from the garden was plentiful: worms, beetles, woodlice, caterpillars, flies, centipedes, moths, plus hostes of others were given in copious quantities. Fruits of various sorts were also given to them but apart from licking at the juice they did not seem too bothered. Growth was excellent. Males and females were obvious at a glance, the males being much heavier and generally larger in size. The tails grew very thick, almost seeming not to be in proportion to their bodies. The summer had now past and there had been no signs of aggression from the males.

During the winter the lights were turned off in the vivarium and the temperatures allowed to fall to 10°C. With the raising of spring temperatures came a raising of aggressive temperament, the dominant male keeping his rivals out of the limelight of the females.

Courting of the females by the males is a very rough and tumble affair; being merely a raising of the chest from the ground, expanding the throat, then a rapid chase. The female is usually gripped at the base of the tail or by a hind limb.

Mating attempts of this kind were seen on a number of occasions during April/May but only once was it seen completed. The male grasped the female's rear right leg after the customary chase, then brought his left hind leg over the female's tail and curved his body to come into contact with the female and complete copulation.

It became obvious after a while from their shape that the females were carrying eggs, and on the 22nd May the sudden loss of weight of one was an obvious sign that she had laid the eggs somewhere in the vivarium. The eggs were carefully buried in a damp spot but close to the heat of the overhead light bulb (the vivarium had a layer of sand and soil which had been deliberately kept damp in anticipation of egg laying). The three eggs were removed and incubated in vermiculite at 24-27°C. This procedure was again followed for a second clutch of eggs laid in July.

On the morning of the 57th day the first inquisitive snout protruded into the world and within an hour had completely emerged and was running about. The hatchlings were quite unlike the adults, being brown with dark brown streaks and dots, the flanks tending towards cream. The tails were a greenish blue. The heads seemed much more pointed and narrower than in the adults. Sloughing of their skins took place within the first 48-72 hours, and then the job of feeding began. In fact this was quite easy, due to their fairly large size of 3.2 cm snout to vent. Baby crickets, fruit fly, wax worm larvae, greenfly, etc., were all very eagerly accepted. As they increased in size they gradually began

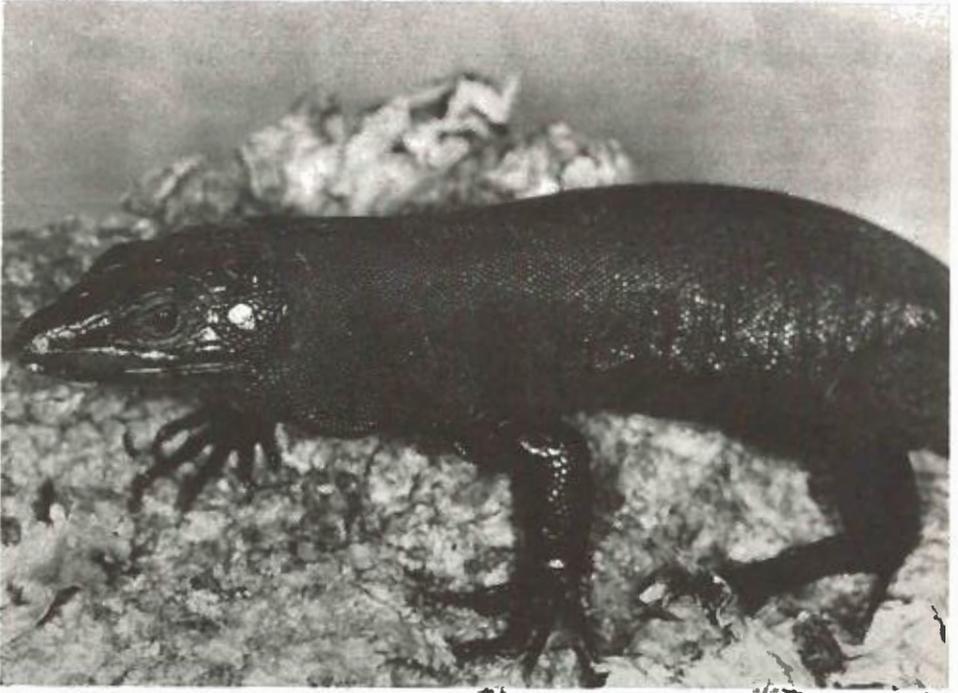


Plate 1. Adult female *Podarcis lilfordi*

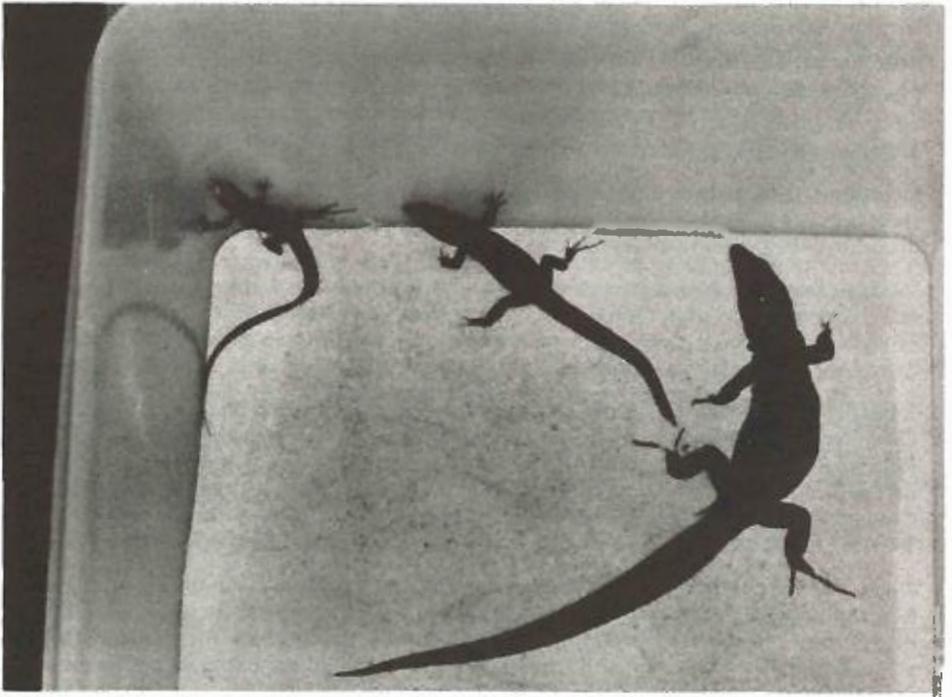


Plate 2. Three *Podarcis lilfordi* of different ages. 6 weeks old, 12 weeks old and adult male.

to darken in colour and by October they were dark brown, including the tail. Even at this small size they show signs of display similar to that described for the adults.

As a matter of interest, no "True-lite" has been used on either adults or young at any time, neither has the use of vitamin D₃ been necessary to maintain them in peak health. It may be possible that this species of wall lizard has a lower requirement for direct ultra-violet radiation than other species but it is my belief that it is the varied and naturally acquired garden food that ensures good healthy specimens.

Pardalis lilfordi is now a protected species as defined by the Berne Convention 1979, requiring a licence to remove it from its habitat. In addition, Spain is advising that licences in future will not be granted except in special circumstances, thus making it less available in the future than it has been in the past.

It would be a great shame if this fascinating and hardy little lizard were to become unavailable to herpetologists in this country. Who knows, it could spark an interest in reptiles to young or not so young as it did to me in my school days.