

## **P8.**

### **Escape behaviour of *Podarcis* of some Mediterranean islets**

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Predation is one of the major selective forces in the evolution of many behavioural traits, particularly in animals subjected to high predation rates, like lizards. Many factors as predation pressure and habitat complexity are known to shape escape behaviour in lizards. We investigated if different *Podarcis* species display a similar escape behaviour under similar environmental conditions. We analyzed data from 9 Mediterranean islets: three in eastern Corsica, three in north-eastern Sardinia, inhabited by *Podarcis tiliguerta*, and three in the eastern coast of the Adriatic sea, inhabited by *P. melisellensis* (Pm, n=62). Islets were all small in size (from about 1 to 22 ha), characterised by comparable predation pressure (hosting no potential ground predators, i.e. snakes, rats), and were classified in two categories of habitat structure complexity. We considered two main traits of escape behaviour: flight initiation distance (FID) and distance fled (FLD) (Kruskall-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests were used). *P. tiliguerta* from Corsica (Ptc, n=97) and from Sardinia (Pts, n=86) were analysed separately following recent studies suggesting substantial morphological and genetical differences between the two groups. Our results highlighted that in *Podarcis* the level of wariness was quite a variable feature, linked more to population variability than to differences among species. Ptc displayed



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the longest FID (significantly longer than Pts,  $P=0.006$ ), probably to compensate with a greater level of awareness its lower locomotory efficiency due to smaller size (Ptc showed the smallest SVL considering the studied islets). FLD, on the contrary, was a less variable trait, likely related to the escape strategy of individuals: *Podarcis* populations of different species and islets run comparable distances when escaping, and lizards that hid in a refuge run significantly shorter distances than lizards that just stopped without hiding.

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