

An unusually high number of Italian wall lizards *Podarcis siculus campestris* entering Great Britain as stowaways

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The Italian wall lizard *Podarcis siculus campestris* occurs in north and central Italy, on the eastern Adriatic Coast and in Corsica (Speybroeck et al., 2016). It is a medium sized lizard, with a total length of about 26 cm of which about 17 cm is accounted for by tail (Speybroeck et al., 2016). Two dorsal green stripes distinguish *P. s. campestris* (Fig. 1) from *Podarcis sicula sicula*. *Podarcis siculus campestris* is active throughout most of the year in the south of its range, which may be challenging in terms of food availability in the autumn and winter months.



Figure 1. A male and female *Podarcis siculus campestris* shortly after being rehomed

Over a period of almost five weeks starting in early October 2020, eight shipments of grapes originating from the Abruzzo region of central/southern Italy were found to contain a total of 29 stowaway *P. s. campestris* (Table 1). The shipments of grapes all came in by sea and the lizards were all discovered in distribution centres by workers. A large supermarket chain reported the interceptions to the National Centre for Reptile Welfare (NCRW), which arranged for all but one of the lizards to be rehomed. This isn't the first time that a shipment containing Italian wall lizards has been reported (Hodgkins et al., 2012), but this is the first report of a closely spaced series of interceptions.

Feeding experiments on the rehomed lizards have shown that they readily feed on grapes; they completely ignored offerings of mango, persimmon and banana. The relatively large numbers found over an extended period in the grape consignments suggests that they were gaining some nutritional benefit from hiding in the bunches of grapes. Mačát et al. (2015) reported *P. siculus* feeding on a range of fruit in Croatia at a time when invertebrate prey was still

Table 1. A record of when and where consignments of grapes containing *Podarcis siculus campestris* were intercepted in England, as well as the number of lizards in each shipment

Date	Location	Number of lizards
07/10/2020	Manchester	1
14/10/2020	Leeds	5
22/10/2020	Leeds	5
27/10/2020	Leeds	10
03/11/2020	Essex	1
03/11/2020	Leeds	4
04/11/2020	Gloucester	1
09/11/2020	Leeds	4

available. Given that the grapes were imported in October and November when invertebrate food is less abundant it seems plausible that the stowaway *P. s. campestris* were feeding on grapes before being accidentally packed with them.

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