A CASE OF A PELOPONNESE WALL LIZARD *PODARCIS PELOPONNESIACUS* ON THE WATER'S SURFACE

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The Peloponnese Wall Lizard *Podarcis peloponnesiacus* is a lacertid species endemic to the Peloponnese, living from the sea level up to 1600 m of altitude. It prefers open, sunny, dry habitats with rocky substrate and sparse vegetation, dry river beds, rocky road embankments, ruins and archaeological sites, dry-stone walls, villages etc. (Katsiyiannis & Tzoras 2025). Rocky hillsides or slopes with large boulders or big stones embedded in the ground are ideal habitats (Sagonas et al. 2017), while rocks and rocky substrate is a prerequisite to their existence (Panagiotopoulos, unpublished data). The lizards use the rocks both for basking and as refugia in case of danger, as well as for sleeping at night. They spend much of the daytime basking on top of a rock, boulder, dry-stone wall or artificial stony surface, and only rarely they climb on fallen tree trunks or the lowest parts of trees (Maragou 1997). On the island of Sapienza, at the southern tip of the Peloponnese, the species was observed on rocks, which is the typical behaviour, but 17% of the observations were of individuals basking on trees, often higher than 3 metres above the ground (Panagiotopoulos et al. 2025). In any case, the typical habitat and habits of the species do not include water or immersion into it.

On 13 July 2025 at 13:30, an interesting observation of a hatchling was made at Kaiafas lagoon, west Peloponnese. As I approached the edge of the water, a hatchling *Podarcis peloponnesiacus* that was basking on floating aquatic vegetation at about 1,5 metres from the water's edge, dived underwater and hid under a floating piece of reed. The animal stayed hidden underwater for about 1-2 minutes and then emerged, climbed on the floating piece of reed and stayed there motionless, half-submerged in the warm water for more than 10 minutes. Eventually, when I got closer to make a photo, it dashed for the shore, revealing that it had been in the water voluntarily, and could exit whenever it wanted to.

Although this particular site is a well-known spot among herpetologists and is very often visited, and although Peloponnese as a whole is very well researched by herpetologists, this behaviour of a land-dwelling and rock-loving lizard spending time on the water's surface has never been seen before. We can only guess what was the cause of this behaviour.

Literature is quite scant when it comes to European lizards in the water. Webb (1980) observed three female *Lacerta viridis* in pools of a slow-flowing river in north-eastern Greece, all semi-submerged, with their bodies in the water and their heads above, and he concluded that the lizards were thermoregulating in this way, avoiding the heat of the day. The same thermoregulation behaviour

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was also seen in Italy from a specimen of *Lacerta bilineata*, while, in the same paper (Di Nicola et al. 2021) four remarkable observations of *Chalcides chalcides* voluntarily entering the water -most probably for thermoregulation- are described.

Apart from thermoregulation, diving into the water can be a means of escaping a predator when no better cover is nearby. Bringsøe (1986) observed a specimen of *Lacerta trilineata* in Peloponnese, diving into a small pond and hiding at the bottom in 80 cm depth for about three minutes, describing it as an escape behaviour. Other European species of the genus Lacerta are also known to enter the water to escape danger (Bringsøe 1986 and references in it). Di Nicola et al. (2021) describe a case of *Podarcis muralis* from Italy, where diving and hiding at the bottom of a stream was again used as a means of escape mechanism.

Fig. 1. *Podarcis peloponnesiacus*. **A.** hatchling just after emerging from under the reed and resting on top of it. **B.** walking on the surface vegetation while escaping to the land.

Another simpler explanation of terrestrial lizards entering the water is plain movement from place to place. Bringsøe (2005) saw an adult *Podarcis muralis* diving in the fast-flowing water of a mountain brook in Euboea, central Greece, in order to cross the brook and reach the opposite bank. This kind of movement through a small stream could be quite common in mountains where territories are crisscrossed by streams, although hard to observe by scientists.

Having in mind all of the above cases, we can speculate on the causes of the *Podarcis peloponnesiacus* hatchling being on the water's surface. Thermoregulation does not seem to be the original cause: the lizard was not immersed in the water in the first place, there were more hatchlings and adults on the land just metres away managing to thermoregulate without the water body, and there were many shady spots nearby if a lizard would like to avoid the heat of the sun.

Predator avoidance does not seem to be the case either: the lizard was relaxed and not running when first encountered. The distance from the water's edge was only 1,5 metres, and the surface of the water was open, so any snake or other predator would be easy to be seen.

Movement to another spot is not a good explanation either. The hatchling was not going somewhere, the open water was ahead of it and the opposite bank was far away. Also, the fact that it was first observed at about 1,5 metres from the water's edge and it exited the water running on the floating vegetation, means that the animal had not fallen in the water accidentally and was not trapped. It seems that it had walked voluntarily there.

A plausible explanation is that the newborn lizard was there looking for insects that swarm all over the surface vegetation, but my presence disrupted anything that it was doing, so I didn't observe any

feeding behaviour. Even the fact that it was a newborn lizard with no experience in life, can be the explanation of this unusual behaviour. Being born just beside the water, and having to find your way through life, may sometimes means that you take the occasional exploratory dip.

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