

Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius* L., 1758) predating Green Lizard (*Lacerta cf. bilineata* Daudin, 1802) at Wick, Worcestershire.

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Introduction

The following observation was made from a moving car in bright sunlight at 1820 hrs BST on 21 April 2016. Approaching Little Comberton on the road from Wick below the hill top by Endon Hall at 52°09'N 2°04'W SO98624461 41 m altitude the roadside verge widens out and is backed by a flailed enclosure hedge of somewhat open habit. To the north the site is significantly sheltered by an outgrown enclosure hedge backing the opposite verge itself backed by a continuous ribbon of planted native hardwood trees.

Two Eurasian Jays *Garrulus glandarius* L., 1758) were immediately obvious in a somewhat agitated state typical of this demonstrative species. One flew from the verge low over the top of the car. Shortly after the second jay reappeared from the base of the open hedge and flew low across the windscreen of the car at a height of some five metres from the ground.

In its beak was dangling a brilliantly coloured male Green Lizard (*Lacerta viridis sensu lato* probably *Lacerta bilineata* Daudin, 1802 following Amann, Rykena, Joger, Nettmann & Veith, 1997) at least 17 cms long, the head having been damaged or compressed by the bird. The combination of the jay's pink plumage, the brilliant yellow ventral surface and bright green dorsal surface of the lizard invoked southern Europe rather than Worcestershire; PFW studied Green Lizards annually in south-eastern Europe for 15 years.

Discussion

The lizard was taken by the jay from the base of the hedge where it is fronted by an open drain infilled over a long time-period with clayey alluvium. Further checking on 22 April 2016 suggested that the lizard may have been basking on one of several cleared areas littered with long-dead flailed twigs on ground which is otherwise wet close to a spring-line marking Jurassic bedrock. The developing herbage, some 20 cms in height at the time, was dominated by Hairy Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* L. and Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica* L. with coarse tussocky grasses and Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* L. on the drier slightly more elevated verge.

In mainland Britain the Western Green Lizard *Lacerta bilineata* has been naturalised on the Dorset coast for 14 years (*British Wildlife* 15:54 [2003]); it was Deichsel, Gleed-Owen & Mayer (2007) who clarified its taxonomy there. It ranges widely through western Europe reaching Jersey; east of Italy it is replaced by the Eastern Green Lizard *Lacerta viridis* (Laurenti, 1768). Lever (2009) cites all the historic releases and failed introductions of Green Lizards in Britain since 1768. These include some in Gloucestershire and it must surely be that the Wick Green Lizard was a liberated or escaped specimen its fortunes enhanced by a climate in which each of the three most recent consecutive years was the warmest on record.

We have not researched the taking of reptiles by Eurasian Jays as it is presumably rare and in the national context the observation described here is unique. The catholic tastes of Eurasian Jays are however well-documented in the ornithological record.

Conclusion

Our initial reaction to this observation was one of incredulity but a thorough consideration of all possible options returns us to this conclusion, namely that an opportunistic jay encountered and killed the only Green Lizard ever to have been observed in the wild in Worcestershire.

References

- Amann, T., Rykena, S., Joger, U., Nettmann, H. K. & Veith, M., 1997. Zur artlichen Trennung von *Lacerta bilineata* Daudin, 1802 und *L. viridis* (Laurenti, 1768). *Salamandra* 33:255-268.
Deichsel, G., Gleed-Owen, C. P. & Mayer, W., 2007. *Lacerta bilineata* (Western Green Lizard) and *Podarcis muralis* (Common Wall Lizard) United Kingdom, Dorset. *Herpetological Review* 38(1):100-101.
Lever, C., 2009. *The Naturalized Animals of Britain and Ireland*, pp. 1-424. New Holland Publishers Ltd.