

Newborn dicephalic *Podarcis sicula*

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Abstract. The author describes a very rare case of dicephalism in a *Podarcis sicula* found in Ragusa (Italy). This is the first account in the world of a malformation of this sort in *Podarcis* spp.

Keywords. *Podarcis sicula*, dicephalism, morphology.

Dicephalism is a teratological type of anomaly characterised by the presence of two heads. Although the existence of malformations of embryonic origin is well documented in many Mammals (Noden and de Lahunta, 1985) and Reptiles, very few cases of dicephalism in saurians have been found. A number of cases of dicephalic snakes was found (Hoser and Harris, 2005; Swanson et al., 1997; Wallach, 2007), but very little records are presently available in chelonians and saurians (Branch, 1982; Broadley, 1972; Diong et al., 2003; Holfert, 1999; Matz, 1989). In fact, taking into account only the sub-order Sauria, it was possible to find out only three cases: the Gekkonid lizard *Rhacodactylus auriculatus* (Bavay, 1869, cited in Holfert, 1999) and two Scincid lizards *Trachylepis* (= *Mabuya*) *striata* (Peters, 1844) and *Egernia striolata* (Peters, 1870) described respectively by Broadley (1972) and by Matz (1989). There is no documented case to date of dicephalism in the Lacertidae family, thus making the dicephalic *Podarcis sicula* here described as the first record as far we are aware.

The *Podarcis* individual was found in Scoglitti, province of Ragusa (Sicily, Italy) in September of 1996. The environment of the location in which it was discovered is typical of the Ibleo particularly arid, it consists of fields of gramineae bounded by dry stone walls. *Podarcis sicula* is distributed throughout the entire territory and it can be found everywhere, often alongside with *Podarcis wagleriana*. The individual observed showed the typical olive green and black reticulated colour pattern with the ventral areas a uniform greenish-white, and measured 6.5 cm total length, tail included. It was a small new-born, vital but evidently emaciated. The individual had a second trunk with a second head and two anterior limbs.

This type of double foetal monstrosity is defined in teratology as *Parapagus*: conjoined twins joined anterolaterally result from two nearly parallel notochords in close



Fig. 1. Dicephalic newborn of *Podarcis sicula*.

proximity. This anomaly represents less than 0.5% of all reported cases of humans conjoined twins (Singhal et al., 2006). The specimen is now kept at the Natural History Museum of Comiso (Ragusa).

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