



Predation Attempt on a Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*) by a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

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The Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis* Linnaeus 1758) is a semi-fossorial legless lizard that is native to western Europe and lives secondarily in some Mediterranean enclaves. *Anguis fragilis* has a very wide geographical distribution, as it occupies most of Europe, from the Iberian Peninsula, England and Scotland (although not Ireland) in the west to central Europe (Dely 1981; Gvozdik et al. 2010). The maximum length of head and body is 291 mm and maximum length of the tail is 280 mm (Dely 1981). It is abundant in the Galicia region (northwestern Spain), where it can be found even in urban areas. The species is linked to the low and dense vegetation of grasslands, but also inhabits scrub and open woodland. The species is threatened by habitat destruction, agricultural pesticides, abandonment of traditional agricultural and livestock work, intensification of agriculture and forestry, fires, and road traffic.

At approximately 1200 h on 12 July 2019, I observed an adult male House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) attacking a juvenile Slow Worm in a garden covered by the plant Marvel-of-Peru (*Mirabilis jalapa*) next to a hotel in Abeleda (Ourense, Spain) (42.39287 N, 7.43960 W).

For a few minutes, the House Sparrow pecked incessantly at the *A. fragilis* before being disturbed by nearby people and vehicles. At that time, due to the risk of being run over, I captured and released the *A. fragilis* in an adjacent meadow. The juvenile had lost the tip of its tail, probably due to the attack. (Fig.1)

House Sparrows are omnivorous, with a diet based mainly on plant material supplemented by invertebrates (Alonso 1985; Murgui 2016) and occasionally small vertebrates. Jędro and Jędro (2018) reported attacks on *Lacerta agilis* in Poland by *P. domesticus*, and predation on reptiles such as the Brown Anole (*Anolis sagrei*) was documented by Anderson (2006) and Howell and Clements (2019). De Armas (2021) summarized predation by *P. domesticus* on lizards, which included several species of anoles and two species of geckos (*Hemidactylus turcicus* and *Gonatodes albogularis*).



Fig. 1. A juvenile Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*) after a predation attempt by a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). The broken tail probably was the result of the predation attempt. Photograph by the author.

Subsequently, Ayres (2021) reported predation on *Podarcis bocagei* in northwestern Spain during the House Sparrow breeding season. At the time of the predation attempt reported herein, the sparrows were in the midst of the breeding season and pairs were nesting on the facade of the adjacent hotel.

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