

Nota Curta / Short Note

# Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* preying on a Wall Lizard *Podarcis muralis* in the NE Iberian Peninsula

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This note documents the first ever recorded observation – with photographs – of a Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* predating on a lizard. Specifically, the Kingfisher captured a Wall Lizard *Podarcis muralis* on the banks of the river Fluvià in Olot, Catalonia, Spain, in 2025, a sighting that adds a rare component to the known predominantly piscivorous diet of this species.

Key words: predation, feeding innovation, Alcedidae, lizard, Olot, Catalonia.

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Feeding innovations in birds have recently attracted great interest due their biological and ecological significance (Ducatez *et al.* 2015, Lefebvre 2020). Of the 4,455 feeding innovations collated by Ducatez *et al.* (2015) from 166 bird families, 45 (1%) correspond to the Kingfishers family *Alcedinidae* and eight involved the Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*. This bird has a vast distribution ranging from north-west Africa and Western Europe to eastern New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago (Woodall 2020). Its diet is primarily piscivorous, with fish constituting approximately 80% of its prey. The remainder consists largely of aquatic insects and crustaceans. Amphibians, primarily larval forms, are consumed occasionally, and represent about 3% of its diet (Woodall 2020). The consumption of reptiles is not mentioned in the descriptions of the diet of the Common Kingfisher or any other of the eight *Alcedo* species (Cramp 1990, Woodall 2020), which indicates that reptiles do not constitute an appreciable part of the diet of any of these species. However, a few observations of the capture of reptiles have been documented for the Common Kingfisher: Mori *et al.* (2011)

report the capture of a snake in Japan, while in a comprehensive dietary study in the Czech Republic, Čech & Čech (2015, 2023) analysed nearly 18,000 samples from camera traps and nest sediment collection, in which they identified a single lizard skull *Lacerta* sp. from amongst the prey items.

An extensive search of the published literature and online photographs of several websites (<https://birdsoftheworld.org/>, <https://search.macaulaylibrary.org/>, <https://www.bird-guides.com/gallery>, <https://es.123rf.com/>, <https://www.shutterstock.com/>) and AI platforms (<https://chat.deepseek.com/>, <https://copilot.microsoft.com/>) was made with the following combinations of keywords: “*Alcedo atthis* reptile”, “Common kingfisher unusual prey”, “Common Kingfisher reptile”, “छोटा कलिकला साँप”, “阿尔塞多在这只爬行动物” without yielding any other photographs or descriptions of the Common Kingfisher capturing reptiles or lizards.

On 18 November 2025, at approximately 12:30 hours, an adult Common Kingfisher was observed perched on a branch of a London plane (*Platanus × hispanica*) on the riverbank



**Figure 1.** Two views of a Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* with a recently captured Wall Lizard *Podarcis muralis* on the concrete riverbank of the river Fluvia, Olot, Spain. November 2025. The lizard is held by one of its hind legs. Photos: Fran Trabalon.

*Dues imatges d'un blauet *Alcedo atthis* amb una sargantana roquera *Podarcis muralis* recentment capturada sobre la barana de formigó del marge del riu Fluvia, Olot, Espanya, el novembre de 2025. La sargantana és subjectada per una de les potes posteriors.*

of the river Fluvia in Olot, NE Spain ( $42^{\circ}10'30''$ N,  $2^{\circ}29'04''$ E). The bird was seen diving from its perch onto the ground adjacent to the river's edge. It disappeared from view momentarily before reappearing on a concrete bank, holding a live Wall Lizard *Podarcis muralis* in its bill. The lizard, grasped by one of its hind legs, struggled unsuccessfully to escape (Fig. 1). After handling the lizard for approximately two minutes, the kingfisher was disturbed by a ped-

estrian and flew with its prey to a branch, approximately 20 m from the observer. It was then seen manipulating the lizard for approximately another minute in preparation for swallowing it headfirst.

This observation represents the first documented case of a Common Kingfisher capturing a lizard in the wild, and the first ever published photographs of this behaviour. It confirms the finding by Čech & Čech (2015,

2023) and Mori *et al.* (2011) that reptiles can form part of this species' diet, albeit exceptionally. The event occurred in an urban riparian setting, suggesting that kingfishers may opportunistically exploit atypical prey items available in their immediate perching territory, even beyond a strictly aquatic environment. This behaviour highlights this species' dietary flexibility. The observation occurred under specific environmental conditions that may have contributed to this opportunistic predation event. The Fluvià river at this location was very shallow, with a depth of approximately 20 cm, which may have hampered the capture of this bird's preferred piscine prey. Furthermore, a high density of five Common Kingfishers was detected along a 3-km stretch of river, suggesting possible territorial pressure or intensified competition for food resources. Finally, the observation took place in November, a period when ectothermic prey such as *P. muralis* typically have poorer metabolic and escape capacities due to the lower environmental temperatures, which may increase their vulnerability to avian predators.

## Resum

### **Observació d'un blauet *Alcedo atthis* depredant una sargantana roquera *Podarcis muralis* al nord-est de la península Ibèrica**

Aquesta nota documenta la primera observació registrada, amb suport d'imatges, d'un blauet comú *Alcedo atthis* capturant un lacèrtid en estat salvatge. L'esdeveniment va consistir en la depredació d'una sargantana roquera *Podarcis muralis* a les ribes del riu Fluvià, a Olot, Catalunya, l'any 2025. Aquesta troballa afegeix un component poc freqüent a la dieta coneguda, predominantment piscívora, d'aquesta espècie.

## Resumen

### **Observación de un martín pescador común *Alcedo atthis* depredando una lagartija roquera *Podarcis muralis* en el noreste de la península Ibérica**

Esta nota documenta la primera observación registrada, respaldada por imágenes, de un Martín Pescador Común *Alcedo atthis* capturando un lacértido en estado salvaje. El evento consistió en la depredación de una lagartija roquera *Podarcis muralis* en las orillas del río Fluvià, en Olot, Cataluña, España, en 2025. Este hallazgo añade un componente poco frecuente a la dieta conocida, predominantemente piscívora, de esta especie.

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