

First report of leucism in *Anguis fragilis*

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The common European slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*) is a member of family Anguillidae distributed from the central Balkans to western Europe including the British Islands (Jablonski et al., 2016). Although it is a common reptiles species and quite diverse in coloration, colour aberrations (e.g. albinism, melanism or ventral blue coloration) are generally very rare in this genus (Robert et al., 1965; Knight, 1966; Jablonski & Meduna, 2010; Gleed-Owen et al., 2012; Hails, 2017). According to the best of our knowledge, leucism has never been reported for this species and genus.

During a field trip on 19th September 2017 six juvenile specimens of *A. fragilis* were observed during cloudy weather under an artificial refuge (large piece of metal) that had been placed in the grassy area. Three were leucistic and three with normal juvenile coloration for the species given their size (Fig. 1). These individuals were around 9-10 cm of total length with an intact tail. The coloration of leucistic juveniles was pinkish with dark eyes. The vertebral strip and lateral coloration were visible and lightly brown. The locality is at 51.4141°N, -1.7195°E near Marlborough, Wiltshire, United Kingdom. Together with slow worms there were three *Vipera berus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (two adults, one juvenile) under the shelter. At the same locality *Natrix helvetica* (Lacépède, 1789) were very abundant. After photographs were taken, all individuals were released.

Leucism with diminished number of iridophores and very low number of melanophores and xanthophores is known and reported in reptiles, predominantly in snakes (Bechtel, 1995; Krecsák, 2008). Therefore, is it not surprising that this colour aberration is found in *A. fragilis* but there is also a possibility that the reports of previous authors did not distinguish between leucism and albinos. Individuals with this colour defect have probably lower levels of survival since they would be conspicuous to predators. This is probably the reason why such aberrated adult individuals are rarely observed in nature (see Gezova et al., 2018). Due to the rarity of similar observation in the genus *Anguis*, any other such information will be much appreciated.

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Figure 1. The leucistic and normal coloured individuals of *A. fragilis* from Marlborough, United Kingdom

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