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PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM CIÊNCIAS BIOLÓGICAS
(ZOOLOGIA)

O ovo flexível: influência da água durante a incubação de *Iguana iguana*

Laura Borelli Thomaz Carreira

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Laura Borelli Thomaz Carreira
Orientador: Augusto Shinya Abe

Tese apresentada ao Instituto de Biociências do Câmpus de Rio Claro, Universidade Estadual Paulista, como parte dos requisitos para obtenção do título de Doutora em Ciências Biológicas (Zoologia).

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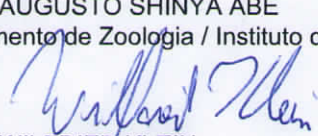
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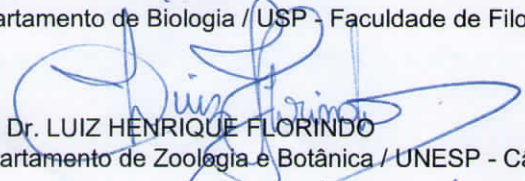
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Prof. Dr. AUGUSTO SHINYA ABE

Departamento de Zoologia / Instituto de Biociências de Rio Claro - SP


Prof. Dr. WILFRIED KLEIN

Departamento de Biologia / USP - Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras de Ribeirão Preto / SP


Prof. Dr. LUIZ HENRIQUE FLORINDO

Departamento de Zoologia e Botânica / UNESP - Câmpus de São José do Rio Preto


Prof. Dr. CLEO ALCANTARA COSTA LEITE

Departamento de Ciências Biológicas / UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SÃO PAULO - UNIFESP


Prof. Dr. JOSE EDUARDO DE CARVALHO

Ecologia e Biologia Evolutiva / Universidade Federal de São Paulo - UNIFESP

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ATA DA DEFESA PÚBLICA DA TESE DE DOUTORADO DE LAURA BORELLI THOMAZ CARREIRA, DISCENTE DO PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM CIÊNCIAS BIOLÓGICAS (ZOOLOGIA), DO INSTITUTO DE BIOCIÊNCIAS - CÂMPUS DE RIO CLARO.

Aos 17 dias do mês de agosto do ano de 2018, às 14:00 horas, no(a) Sala da Congregação - Prédio da Administração/IBRC, reuniu-se a Comissão Examinadora da Defesa Pública, composta pelos seguintes membros: Prof. Dr. AUGUSTO SHINYA ABE - Orientador(a) do(a) Departamento de Zoologia / Instituto de Biociências de Rio Claro - SP, Prof. Dr. WILFRIED KLEIN do(a) Departamento de Biologia / USP - Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras de Ribeirão Preto / SP, Prof. Dr. LUIZ HENRIQUE FLORINDO do(a) Departamento de Zoologia e Botânica / UNESP - Câmpus de São José do Rio Preto, Prof. Dr. CLEO ALCANTARA COSTA LEITE do(a) Departamento de Ciências Biológicas / UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SÃO PAULO - UNIFESP, Prof. Dr. JOSE EDUARDO DE CARVALHO do(a) Ecologia e Biologia Evolutiva / Universidade Federal de São Paulo - UNIFESP, sob a presidência do primeiro, a fim de proceder a arguição pública da TESE DE DOUTORADO de LAURA BORELLI THOMAZ CARREIRA, intitulada **O ovo flexível: influência da água durante a incubação de Iguana iguana**. Após a exposição, a discente foi arguida oralmente pelos membros da Comissão Examinadora, tendo recebido o conceito final: APROVADO. Nada mais havendo, foi lavrada a presente ata, que após lida e aprovada, foi assinada pelos membros da Comissão Examinadora.

Prof. Dr. AUGUSTO SHINYA ABE

Prof. Dr. WILFRIED KLEIN

Prof. Dr. LUIZ HENRIQUE FLORINDO

Prof. Dr. CLEO ALCANTARA COSTA LEITE

Prof. Dr. JOSE EDUARDO DE CARVALHO

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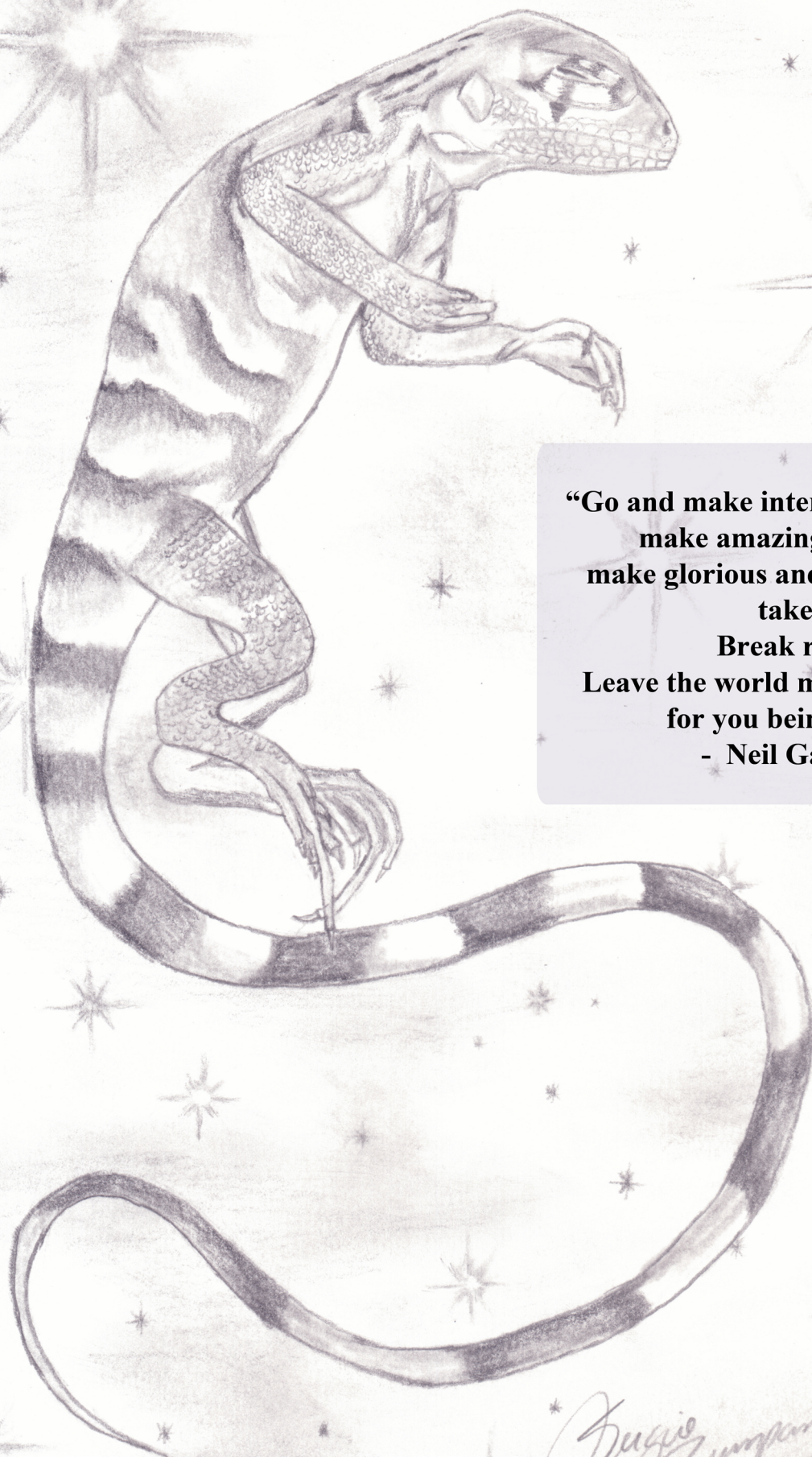
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**“Go and make interesting mistakes,
make amazing mistakes,
make glorious and fantastic mis-
takes.**

Break rules.

**Leave the world more interesting
for you being here.”**

- Neil Gaiman

Buzio Zumpano
Amasti
MAIO 2018

“This is how you do it:

**You sit down at the keyboard and
you put one word after another until its done.**

It's that easy, and that hard.”

- Neil Gaiman

Resumo

Os ovos de cascas flexíveis são ausentes de reserva hídrica provida pela mãe, e necessitam absorver água, necessária para o seu metabolismo, através do meio de incubação que, em condições naturais, é diretamente influenciado pelo regime de chuvas. Desta forma, com o objetivo central de entender a fisiologia embrionária de répteis que possuem ovos de casca flexível, foram utilizados ovos de iguana verde (*Iguana iguana*) incubados sob diferentes potenciais hídricos variando de extremamente seco para extremamente úmido, onde foram avaliados parâmetros que refletem a fisiologia do balanço hídrico destes embriões: osmolalidade, massa seca, conteúdo de água e pressão interna dos ovos. Além disso diagnósticos por imagens de microscopia eletrônica de varredura e ressonância magnética também foram aplicados com o intuito de verificar a morfologia da casca destes ovos e a avaliação não invasiva do desenvolvimento embrionário sob diferentes condições hídricas, respectivamente. Dentre os principais resultados encontram-se um aumento bastante significativo da concentração osmótica de fluido alantóico em ambiente extremamente seco resultando em 385 mOsm/kg. As taxas de massas mostram que os embriões exibem um aumento de 158% em tratamentos extremamente secos quando comparados com tratamentos úmidos. Em condições secas os ovos apresentaram deformação da casca e o embrião representou a maior parte do ovo inteiro, com frações muito pequenas de vitelo e alantoide. A espessura da casca varia conforme a condição hídrica, podendo apresentar uma redução superior a 50%. Além disso, existe um desgaste da casca do ovo ao final da incubação resultante principalmente da ação hídrica, além da degradação por microrganismos, e não da mobilização de cálcio para o embrião conforme ocorre em ovos de casca dura. Também foi possível verificar a presença de fibras internas na casca dos ovos de iguana que, provavelmente, são responsáveis por conferir a capacidade elástica aos ovos suportando absorção de grandes quantidades de água além do crescimento do embrião. As imagens de ressonância magnética permitiram detalhar o desenvolvimento embrionário sob diferentes condições hídricas, revelando variações na morfologia interna e externa (deformações da casca) do ovo, além de mostrar o impacto de ambientes secos na dinâmica espacial do interior do ovo, resultando em pouco espaço para o desenvolvimento do embrião. Afim de complementar o estudo de imagens, foram realizadas capturas de imagens de ressonância de ovos de *H. mabouia* e *C. latirostris*, onde pudemos observar pela primeira vez a presença de saco de ar em um ovo reptiliano de jacaré de papo amarelo com 90% de

incubação, revelando assim mais uma grande semelhança para com as aves, devido sua proximidade evolutiva. Considerando todos os principais dados obtidos, podemos concluir que a disponibilidade de água para o ovo afeta não só suas respostas fisiológicas como também a morfologia da casca, provocando aspecto deformado e reduzindo sua espessura devido à desidratação. Contudo, embriões de iguana apresentaram uma grande tolerância a ambientes hostis, e mesmo sob condições desfavoráveis foram capazes de completar seu desenvolvimento e eclodir.

Palavras-chave: Herpetologia, Fisiologia Embrionária, Potencial Hídrico, Osmolalidade, Diagnóstico por Imagem.

Abstract

The eggs of flexible hulls are absent from the water reserve provided by the mother, and need to absorb water, necessary for its metabolism, through the incubation medium that, under natural conditions, is directly influenced by the rainfall regime. Thus, with the main objective to understand the embryonic physiology of reptiles that have flexible shell eggs, green iguana eggs were used (*Iguana iguana*) incubated under different water potentials ranging from extremely dry to extremely wet, which were evaluated parameters reflecting the physiology of water balance of these embryos: osmolality, dry mass, water content and internal pressure of eggs. In addition, diagnostic imaging of scanning electron microscopy and magnetic resonance imaging were also applied to verify the shell morphology of these eggs and the noninvasive evaluation of embryonic development under different water conditions, respectively. Among the main results are a very significant increase of the osmotic concentration of allantoic fluid in extremely dry environment resulting in 385 mOsmol / kg. Mass rates show that embryos exhibit a 158% increase in extremely dry treatments when compared to moist treatments. In dry conditions the eggs showed deformation of the shell and the embryo represented the greater part of the whole egg, with very small fractions of calf and allantois. The thickness of the bark varies according to the water condition, being able to present a reduction of more than 50%. In addition, there is a detrition of the eggshell at the end of incubation resulting mainly from the water action, besides the degradation by microorganisms, and not the mobilization of calcium to the embryo as it occurs in eggs of hard shell. It was also possible to verify the presence of internal fibers in the shell of the iguana eggs, which are probably responsible for imparting the elastic capacity to the eggs, supporting the absorption of large amounts of water besides the growth of the embryo. Magnetic resonance images allowed detail embryonic development under different water conditions, showing changes in internal and external morphology (peeling deformation) of the egg, and show the impact of dry environments in the spatial dynamics of the interior of the egg, resulting in little space for the development of the embryo. In order to complement the study of images were performed resonance imaging catch *H. mabouia* and *C. latirostris* eggs, where we can observe the first time the presence of air bag in a chat yellow reptilian egg alligator 90% of incubation, thus revealing a great similarity to the birds, due to its evolutionary proximity. Considering all the main data obtained, we can conclude that the water availability to the egg affects not only its physiological

responses but also the shell morphology, causing deformed appearance and reducing its thickness due to dehydration. However, iguana embryos presented great tolerance to hostile environments, and even under unfavorable conditions were able to complete their development and hatch.

Key-words: Herpetology, Embryonic Physiology, Water Potential, Osmolality, Diagnostic Imaging.

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Introduction

1. Reptiles

Reptiles are represented in a single Class, Reptilia, Split into four Orders: Chelonia (turtles, terrapins and tortoises), Squamata (lizards and snakes), Rynchocephalia (tuataras) and Crocodylia (crocodilians). Oviparity and incubation buried in terrestrial nests are the typical way of reproduction in all Orders; with the exception of some Squamates that exhibit oviparity and curl around the eggs to hatch than (i.e. *Python molurus*) and viviparity (i.e. some snakes), and some species of gecko that leave their eggs exposed (i.e. *Hemidactylus mabouia*) (DEEMING; UNWIN, 2004).

Squamata can be found on all continents except Antarctica. This wide distribution, in tropical, subtropical, arid and even cold regions, shows a wide ecological, physiological and behavioral flexibility, which is corroborated by the great diversity of species, constituting the largest group of living reptiles (ZUG et al., 2001). This distribution occurred, among other factors, due to the cleidoic eggs, that allowed the development of the embryo in a diversity of terrestrial environments. However, there are morphological differences between the types of eggs of the various species of reptiles, which may be significant for embryonic development.

2. The cleidoic egg

Reptilian eggs are all cleidoic, characterised by large yolks and the development of the embryo to an advanced free-living hatchling. Embryogenesis in the egg is supported by extra-embryonic membranes (Figure 1), i.e. the amnion, chorion, yolk sac and allantoic fluid, that variously offer physical protection, allow utilisation of the yolk, permit respiration, and enable storage of waste products; and they also have a fibrous shell membrane that covering the egg (DEEMING; UNWIN, 2004).

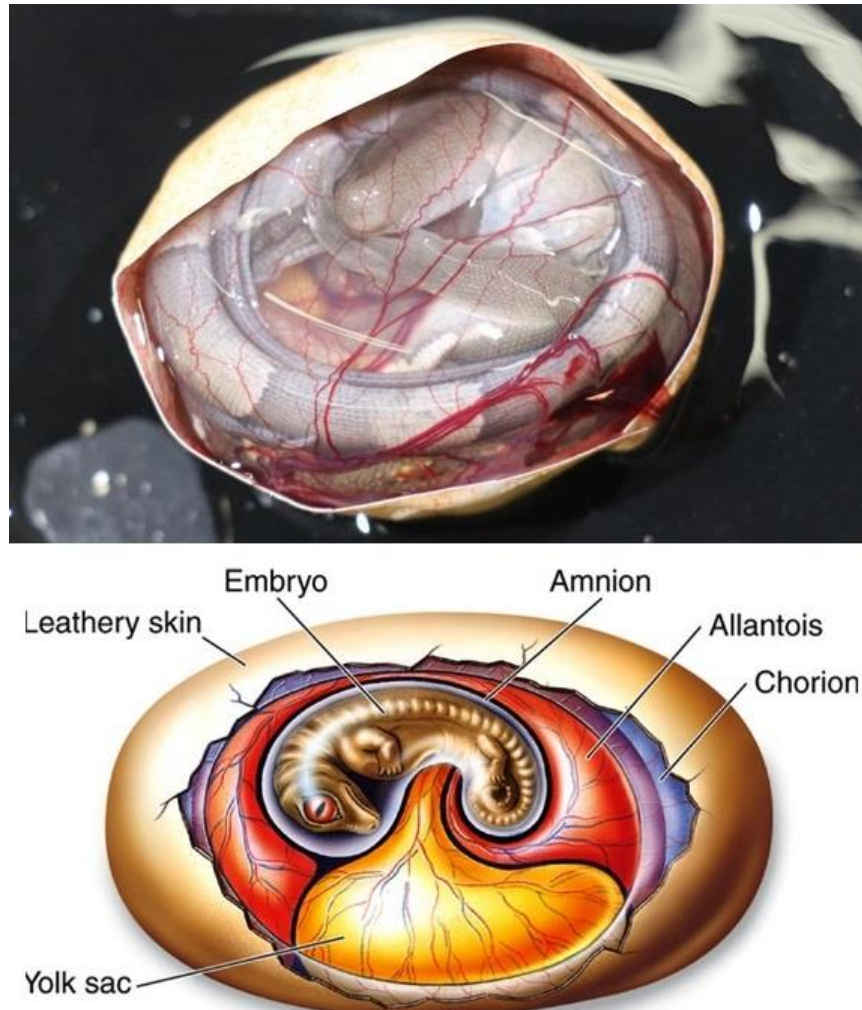


Figure 1. Below: Graphic representation of a reptilian egg and structures (JOVCEV, 2016); Above: Picture of an open iguana egg with 90% of incubation (Personal file).

According to Packard (1982), reptile eggs generally can be divided into three large groups, based on their shell structures: eggs with more flexible shells, those with little or none calcareous layer (most Squamata); eggs with intermediate shell flexibility (some chelonians); and rigid shelled eggs with a well-developed calcareous layer (crocodilians and some chelonians).

In this sense, it is known that eggs of more flexible shells tend to present a greater variability in the gain and loss of water to the environment and may in some cases double or even triple their initial size, from the moment of laying to the final stage of incubation, due to the uptake of water throughout the embryonic development (SARTORI, 2012). For this reason, this type of egg becomes much more susceptible to environmental water variations than the others, with more rigid shells that tend to exchange very little water with

the environment, thus presenting little or no change in size during incubation (FEDER et al.,1982; PACKARD et al,1979; M.J. PACKARD et al,1982; WOODALL,1984; MORRIS et al,1983; PACKARD and PACKARD,1988b,1989).

3. Embryonic development and the influence of environmental factors

Considering the water susceptibility of eggs with flexible shell and added to the possible environmental adversities that the embryo may face during incubation (periods of drought and / or heavy rainfall), and the absence of parental care characteristic of reptiles (WARNER, 2011), it is necessary that the embryo presents great tolerance to these adversities or that there are physiological modulations that allow their full development. In addition, these conditions may have a profound influence on phenotypic development, thus having important consequences on the physical condition of the animal (WEST-EBERHARD, 2003; GILBERT and EPEL, 2008) and, therefore, survival after hatch.

According to Packard (1981b), approximately 70% of the egg mass of reptiles, at the time that they are laid, is composed of water. The water present in the albumen moves to the yolk sac through an osmotic process of a water potential present in the liquid that is in its interior. This process initiates inside the female and is perpetuated for up to one week after egg laying (PACKARD 1981a). However, the water regulation throughout the incubation process is still unknown. Thus, the water present in the albumen even before the posture could explain why in the first half of the incubation process the eggs show few changes in their mass, both when incubated in drier or wetter environments. This water reserve could prevent water stress in some species of water stress during the first stage of egg incubation. Nevertheless, during the second half of the hatchery period, the reserve will generally have been used making the embryo more vulnerable to environmental conditions and dependent on the uptake of water from the environment, causing a greater variation in egg mass.

Sartori (2012) showed that the green iguana (*Iguana iguana*) eggs accumulate 0.02 mM of urea, representing 82% of the total measurable nitrogen residues accumulated within the allantoic during incubation. That is, it is necessary that the embryo develops properly even with the presence of potentially harmful residues within the egg. For this reason, the study by Tracy (1980) shows that less calcareous eggs are capable of large and rapid absorption

of water by the environment, which may be a strategy used to promote the development of embryos, allowing the absorption of water present in the ground.

Eggs incubated on wetter substrates generally tend to have a shorter incubation period, with larger neonates and a higher birth rate than eggs incubated on drier substrates. This shows that these eggs are more sensitive to water variations of the environment (PACKARD, 1982). However, the ideal amount of moisture varies for each species. Still, little is known about the water balance that occurs during embryonic development in reptiles. Although there is robust evidence for the regulation of water and solute inside the eggs of reptiles and birds (BADHAM, 1971; VLECK, 1991), the physiological regulation of water uptake by eggs of these animals is still unclear. The results obtained by Warner (2011) suggest that the water absorption by eggs is, to a significant extent, a passive hydraulic process during the initial incubation; but live embryos are needed to maintain or regulate water uptake in later stages.

The study of the water balance in reptile eggs has not been enough explored, and most of the studies work with rigid shelled eggs (calcareous layer). Thus, the knowledge of the development of more flexible eggs is still unknown. The fact is interesting, since the Squamata, lizards and snakes, which represent the most diversified reptiles and are the ones with the greatest geographical distribution present this type of egg. This study investigates the water relations of flexible shelled eggs in relation to the humidity of the incubation media in lizards. To do so, we used Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*) eggs, because this animal (Figure 2) lives in different biomes as: Savannah, Semi-arid forest, Pantanal and Amazon rainforest, and therefore they must adjust their physiology according to the different rainfall regimes in order to complete the incubation process.

Chapter V - General Conclusions

It was first described that vermiculite is a widely used substrate for egg incubation, because it has a high water absorption capacity and also a high temperature retention. However, these two characteristics also turns it a difficult material to measure water potential with good precision.

Many studies that worked with reptile incubation tried to measure the water potential of vermiculite by using, generally, the psychrometer methodology. Nonetheless, it was explained in Chapter I that this is not the best choice of methodology for vermiculite. And despite we tried not only psychrometer, buy tension table and Richard's Chamber, it was Gypsum Block the methodology that provide good results in a short period of time.

This means that to use data from papers that didn't used Gypsum Block to measure water potential in incubation media it's, probably, recommended an application of a correction factor or a new measurement of these data with the appropriated methodology.

The different treatments of water potential of vermiculite used in this study revealed some physiological responses in *Iguana iguana* eggs described in Chapter II. In this section, we firstly see that the embryo represents a fraction of 52.15% of the egg in ED condition, meaning an increase of 158% if compared to the embryo fraction of EW condition. This didn't mean an increase of embryo size in ED, but infers that eggs incubated in extremely dry conditions doesn't have high amounts of allantoic fluid (29.97% in ED; 48.65% in EW) or yolk (12.71% in ED; 21.43% in EW) when compared to eggs incubated in extremely wet conditions. Therefore, the embryo occupies more space inside the egg.

Also in Chapter II, the osmotic parameters seemed altered in ED conditions with the higher value of 385 mOsmol/kg in allantoic fluid at 90% IP against to 47 mOsmol/kg at 90% IP in EW condition. And besides the ED condition, all other treatments seem to decrease the osmotic concentration during IP. Yolk osmotic values also showed a pattern to decrease along the IP in all treatments, with statistical significant difference in ED and D conditions.

It seems that the first third of IP is a critical period, since generally *I. iguana* present higher allantoic osmotic values at this point then in the rest of incubation. This could also be a strategy for water absorption, since the egg is more concentrated at 30% IP it's easier to absorb water from the external environment. However, more study must be done in this area in order to prove this.

Just laid eggs have an amount of water of 71% from the total initial egg mass. Eggs in ED and VD conditions present the lower dry mass, showing statistical difference from the other treatments. However, the hatchlings from these treatments didn't differed in weight and length from the others. This may indicate that the lack of water didn't affect the size of hatchling at

first, but it will interfere in physiological parameters such as osmolality that could be damaging for the embryo if exposed in extremely dry conditions. To prove that, more study must be done in this field, probably by measuring allantoic osmolality of *I. iguana* eggs incubated in dryer conditions than the treatments used in this work.

Because of this water impacts on the physiology of the embryo, Chapter III is dedicated to investigate images from scanning electron microscopy of *Iguana iguana* eggshell under different water potentials. Those images showed that *I. iguana* eggshells present pores in a very spaced pattern from one to another, making it difficult to observe them by area, and not allowing an estimate of the total pore number present in the shell. Exactly because this pore-spaced pattern, we can suggest that water and gas exchanges should be made mostly through the permeability of the eggshell itself than only by the pores.

Also, in Chapter III we could see the effect of the water and its lack in eggshells at 90% of IP. At this point, we presented a wild morphological variation for the external part of the eggshell and also a significant thickness reduction in ED condition (52% of reduction), when compared to the initial thickness values at the moment of laying, probably due to dehydration. And finally, we described the inner layer of the shell that is constituted by a network of organic fibers that provide the flexibility capacity, which is an outstanding characteristic of this type of egg.

In order to understand the affect of water in the morphology of the egg, we also did RMI scans of *I.iguana* eggs under different water potentials and at different incubation periods. These images were presented in Chapter IV, revealing that at 50% of incubation under ED condition the egg is deformed and it was impossible to detect the presence of allantoic fluid. However, at 90% of incubation under ED condition the egg doesn't seemed deformed, but still the allantoic fluid wasn't located.

In comparison of the other substrate hydratation conditions was possible to see a difference in the yolk, where in the Dry condition it is much smaller than in the Intermediate and Wet conditions used. This is probably due to the dehydration but may also be because of the production of metabolic water in wetter conditions.

Chapter IV is also dedicated to the morphological study of rigid shelled eggs as *C. latirostris* and *H. mabouia*, that were scanned at 90% of incubation but in this case the water potential wasn't the main goal because we wanted to see the morphology of the embryo, the structures of the egg, and if the MRI technique is valid for rigid shelled eggs due to the high thickness of the eggshell.

MRI was valid for this kind of egg, and we also discovered some remarkable thing about *C. latirostris* egg. This caiman egg presents an air sac in front of the nose of the embryo, just like avian eggs, and *H. mabouia* doesn't has this structure proving that it's not related to rigid shelled eggs.

The air sac is used in “*pipping*” behavior, showing that this animal is very similar to birds due to its evolutionary proximity. Other possible use for the air sac is as an acoustic box, since both crocodilians and birds vocalize inside the egg when it's close to hatch, in order to synchronize the hatchling.

However, more studies must be done in this area. Firstly, by scanning more eggs from more crocodilian species to see if this structure is present in all Order Crocodylia. Secondly, by investigate if there is any relation of the air sac to the vocalization pre-hatchling as an acoustic box.

In summary, this work provides some insights about the influence of the water during incubation of flexible shelled eggs of *Iguana iguana*, revealing that these eggs can resist to hostile environments that lack in water and still hatch. However, there is still a lot to investigate about dry substrate tolerance in embryo physiology and shell morphology due to flexibility. In addition, this study opens a new field of work in crocodilians eggs with the aim to see if air sac is truly present in all Order Crocodylia, and if there is other function for it than “*pipping*”.

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