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Rock, paper, scissors, lizard

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Male side-blotched lizards (*Uta stansburiana*) have three heritable throat colors, associated with three divergent mating strategies. In the 19 December [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#), Zamudio and Sinervo find that these alternative mating strategies can stably coexist because, as in a game of rock, paper, scissors, each strategy has strengths over one other, and weaknesses in the face of the third (*Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 2000, published online ahead of print). The strategy of blue-throated males is to guard their mates faithfully, whereas orange-throated males rely on aggression, and yellow-throated males try to sneak in on females that already have a partner. Zamudio and Sinervo define the success of these strategies by tracking paternity in the lizards using nine microsatellite loci. They find that the faithful blue-throated males sire the most offspring in singly sired clutches, successfully excluding most sneaker yellow-throated males. The blue throaters often succumb, however, to the aggression of the orange throaters. These incursions into blue-throater territory bring the orange-throated aggressors success, but leave them open to sneaking by the yellow-throated lizards. Yellow throaters also sire by far the most offspring posthumously, suggesting that their sperm is particularly good at persisting inside the female for later fertilization.

References

1. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, [<http://www.pnas.org/>]