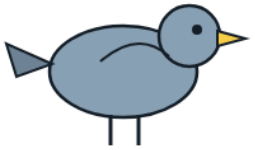
That is why

Why do zombie snails have pulsing eyes?

A parasitic flatworm fills the snail's eye stalks with pulsing brood sacs that look like food to birds.

A The life cycle of Leucochloridium paradoxum

1 A bird eats the eye stalk



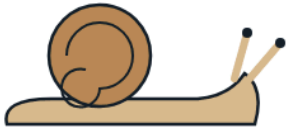
It mistakes the pulsing stalk for a caterpillar. Each brood sac holds 100 to 250 larvae.

2 Eggs leave in bird droppings



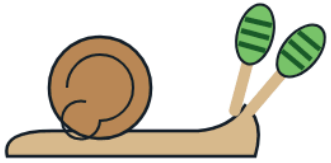
Adult worms, about 1.5 mm long, breed in the bird's cloaca. Their eggs land on leaves.

3 A snail eats the droppings



Amber snails (Succinea) swallow the eggs while feeding. The larvae hatch inside.

4 Brood sacs fill the eye stalks



Striped and swollen, they pulse 40 to 75 times a minute, and the snail moves into light.

B Why the trick works

1 It looks like food

The striped, pulsing sacs look like a wriggling caterpillar or grub, so birds peck at them. This is called aggressive mimicry.

2 It changes behaviour

Infected snails stay longer in bright, high, open places. In one study 53% stayed exposed, against 28% of healthy snails.

3 The snail can survive

After a bird bites off a stalk, the snail can regrow it, and the parasite can fill it again.

A parasite that turns its host into bait.

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