



## Reptiles

### Ecology

There are six native reptile species in the UK; three snakes and three lizards. These are the grass snake, adder, smooth snake, common lizard, sand lizard and slow-worm.

Reptiles generally emerge from hibernation in March. Mating activity is highest in April and May, and juveniles are usually born or hatch from July to September. Most reptiles give birth to live young, except for grass snakes and sand lizards which lay eggs. Reptiles then begin to hibernate again in November.

Common lizard and sand lizard eat small insects, such as flies, grasshoppers and spiders. Slow-worms mostly eat slugs, snails and other invertebrates, with backward-pointing teeth helping them to manage slippery prey.

Grass snakes forage on amphibians, such as frogs, toads and newts, as well as smaller fish species during spawning. Adders tend to favour small mammals, such as voles, but have a flexible diet and will also take frogs, nesting birds and other reptiles. Adders are the UK's only venomous snake. Smooth snakes are considered reptile specialists, feeding on common lizards, slow-worms, and even young adders.

### Habitat and distribution

The four more common reptile species are widespread throughout England and Wales, although their distribution is patchy as a result of habitat requirements. Sand lizard and smooth snake are particularly rare and have more localised populations.

Habitats favoured by reptiles include, rough grassland, hedgerows, dense scrub, woodland edges and heathland. Railway embankments are also highly suitable for basking and foraging reptiles. Grass snakes require waterbodies with adjacent terrestrial habitat that offers sufficient shelter from predators.

### Why are reptiles protected?

Natural reptile habitats, such as woodland margins, ponds, hedgerows, and heathlands, have declined rapidly in the past century. Other threats include, improper use of pesticides and predation from domestic cats. These threats have resulted in declines in all our reptile species.

### The law

Common lizard, slow-worm, grass snake and adder are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). They are listed as a Schedule 5 species therefore part of Section 9(1) and section 9(5) apply. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 also strengthens their protection.

You may commit a criminal offence if you:



- Intentionally or recklessly kill, or injure, the above species
- Sell, offer, advertise, or transport for sale, the above species

Sand lizard and smooth snake receive full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

You may commit a criminal offence if you:

- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly kill, injure, or capture, any sand lizards or smooth snakes
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb sand lizards or smooth snakes, in such a way to be likely to significantly affect:
  - their ability to survive, breed, reproduce, rear or nurture their young
  - their ability to hibernate or migrate
  - their local distribution or abundance
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly take or destroy the eggs of sand lizards
- Damage or destroy breeding sites or resting places of sand lizards or smooth snakes
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb sheltering sand lizards or smooth snakes, or obstruct access to their resting place
- Keep, transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange, any live or dead sand lizards or smooth snakes, any part of such an animal, or anything derived from such an animal

Penalties for offences include fines of up to £5000, plus up to six months imprisonment, for each offence committed.

Local Planning Authorities will often ask for a reptile survey to be undertaken as part of planning if the proposed development has the potential to impact on reptiles or their habitats. It should be noted that developments that are not subject to planning permission are still subject to the above legislation.