

# Slow-worm

*Anguis fragilis*



## Description

Slow-worms look very similar to small snakes but are in fact legless lizards. They have eyelids (so can blink), ear openings, a flat forked tongue, and can drop their tail to escape from a predator, although it never fully grows back. They can grow up to 50cm in length.

Slow-worms have a shiny appearance. Males are greyish brown (although this is variable) and sometimes have blue spots; whereas females are coppery brown with dark sides. Females sometimes have a dark stripe long the middle of the back. Juveniles are small, measuring only around 4cm long, are very thin and have gold, silver or copper dorsal sides, sometimes with a dark stripe running along the length of the body along the back.

Slow-worms don't tend to bask in the open, they prefer to hide under logs, in compost heaps, or sheets of corrugated iron in the sun. They feed on slugs, snails, spiders, insects and earthworms, mostly at dusk.

They emerge from hibernation in spring, and breeding takes places during April and May. Slow-worms are ovoviviparous which means the eggs are laid within the female's body. The females then incubate the eggs internally, and eventually 'give birth' to around eight live young in the late summer. They survive winter by hibernating underground, or beneath piles of leaves, or within tree roots.

They are eaten by many predators such as snakes, hedgehogs, foxes, birds, and the domestic cat.

## Where and when to see them

- They are common in Wales and south-west England, they are notably absent from Ireland.
- They are often found in humid conditions and favour meadows, woodland edges, farmland, gardens and allotments.
- They are active from March to November.
- Check under logs or sheets of corrugated iron, but remember to replace anything that you move.

## Legal status

The species is listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife &

Countryside Act, it is therefore an offence to kill, injure or sell or trade them.

## Did you know?

The discarded tail continues to move and wriggle about in order to distract the attacker, whilst the slow-worm escapes! Slowworms are completely harmless and are helpful to gardeners by eating slugs, snails and other pest invertebrates. They can live up to 20 years!

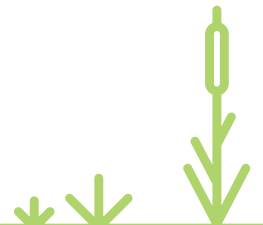
## Other links

[Amphibian & Reptile Conservation](#)

[Froglife](#)

[The Wildlife Trusts](#)

[Woodland Trust](#)



## Similar Species

	<b>Slow-worm</b> ( <i>Anguis fragilis</i> )	<b>Adder</b> ( <i>Vipera berus</i> )	<b>Grass snake</b> ( <i>Natrix natrix</i> )
Size	40-50cm long	40-70cm long	100-130cm long
Appearance	Short & slender	Stocky	Long & slender
Colouration	Males are greyish brown and sometimes have blue spots. Females are coppery brown with dark sides. Females sometimes have a dark stripe long the middle of the back. Juveniles are only around 4cm long, are very thin and have gold, silver or copper dorsal sides, sometimes with a dark stripe running along the length of the body along the back. They have a shiny appearance.	Males are grey with a black zig-zig or diamond pattern down their backs, females tend to be more brown with a dark brown zig-zag stripe. Adult adders can also be black, whilst juveniles can be a brick-red colour.	Grass snakes are usually olive green in colour, with a distinctive yellow and black neck collar. These reptiles have pale bellies and dark blotches or bars can be found along the body.
Pupil	Round, and has eyelids	Vertical	Round
Habitat	Heathland, grassland, woodland edges, gardens, allotments.	Heathland, scrub, woodland edge and embankments.	Wetland habitats but also grassland, heaths and gardens.
Food	Slugs, snails, spiders, insects.	Small mammals, lizards, amphibians and ground nesting birds and eggs.	Amphibians, fish, nesting birds.
Danger	Harmless	Venomous	Harmless, but can excrete foul-smelling substance from anal gland.
Behaviour	Can shed its tail if attacked. They don't tend to bask in the open, they prefer to hide under logs, in compost heaps, or sheets of corrugated iron in the sun.  Females incubate eggs internally, and eventually 'give birth' to around eight live young in the late summer (ovoviviparous).	Bask in sun on warm days. Give birth to live young (viviparous).	Bask in sun on warm days. Can play dead or rear up in a mock attack posture. Excellent swimmers. Lay eggs (oviparous).

