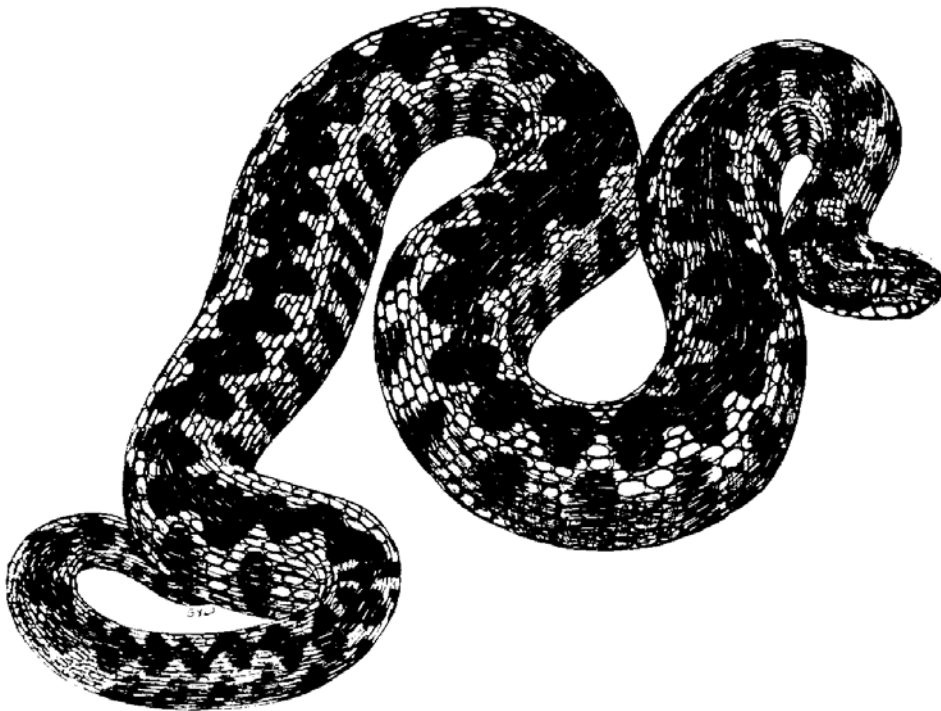




nakes Alive!

A Survey of Reptiles for
Leicestershire and Rutland



Snakes Alive!

The rocks of Leicestershire have produced some of the most impressive fossil reptiles in Britain. Their descendants are still around but, smaller and shyer and they are rarely seen. We are looking for reptiles in Leicestershire and Rutland - and we need your help!

Why Do We Need To Know About Reptiles?

They are one of the most fascinating groups of animals, but unfortunately also one of the most threatened. Reptile numbers have declined tremendously in recent years, due to loss or neglect of their habitats and to persecution, so now all our reptiles are given legal protection. The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan recognised that we need to know more about our reptiles - are they really rare, or are they just elusive? This survey aims to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge.

What Are We Looking For?

There are four reptiles in Leicestershire and Rutland - two snakes, one lizard, and one lizard that looks like a snake!



Grass Snake

What? Our largest snake, growing up to one metre long, the grass snake is mainly an olive-green colour with dark blotches and with a distinctive yellow and black collar behind the head.

Where? The grass snake is the most common reptile in Leicestershire and

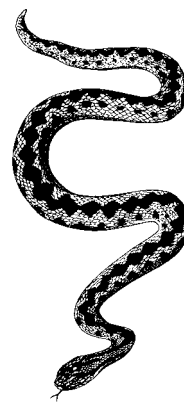
Rutland, found scattered across the two counties. It is essentially a wetland species which can swim well, and feeds on amphibians and fish. It is found at sites such as Rutland Water and the canals.

Fact! The grass snake may lay its leathery, white eggs, each about 2.5 cm long, in your compost heap, so look out for them when you dig out the compost!



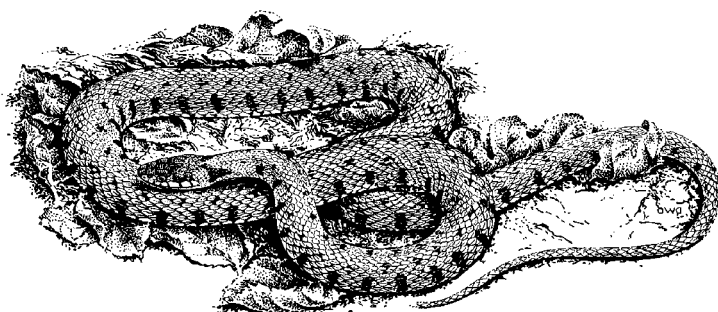
Adder

What? The adder is a brownish (females) or greyish (males) colour, with a very distinctive dark zigzag line down its back, and a dark X or V mark on its head. It only grows up to about 65 cm.



Where? The adder is rare, with recent records from a few sites in Rutland and perhaps Charnwood. Its preferred habitat is heathland or open woodland, where it feeds on mice, frogs, and lizards (another of our target species).

Fact! The adder is our only venomous reptile, so if you are lucky enough to see one, do not try to touch it. If you leave it alone, it will leave you alone. The danger from adders is much exaggerated. Very few people have died from adder bites - far more people die from dog bites. The bite would, nevertheless, be painful.



Grass snake camouflaged amongst leaves

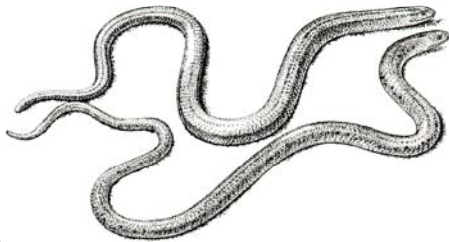


Slow-Worm

What? Actually a lizard without legs, the slow-worm resembles a smooth, slender snake, growing up to 50 cm long, and little thicker than a pencil. It is a shiny grey-brown or bronze colour. The female has dark stripes. Young slow-worms are an attractive gold or silver colour.

Where? There are few recent records of slow-worms, mainly from Rutland, but they are elusive and may be more widespread. Preferring drier habitats, they often crop up in gardens and allotments, where they feed on slugs and worms, especially the little white slugs – slow-worms are a gardener's friend!

Fact! The other common name for a slow-worm is the blind-worm – but they are not slow, blind or worms.

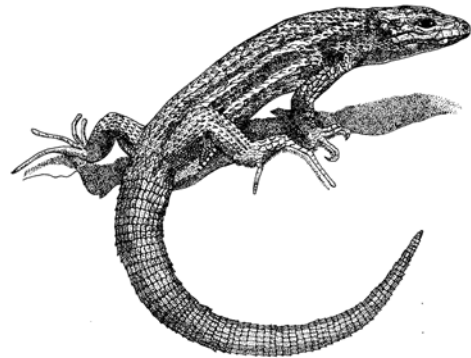


Common Lizard

What? The common lizard grows up to 14 cm long and is slender with a long pointed tail. The tail may be stumpy if it has been lost and has regrown. It is usually a brown colour, though it may be grey, green or reddish, with streaks and spots.

Where? Despite its name, the common lizard is rare and mainly seen in the Charnwood Forest and in Rutland. It is most likely to be seen basking in sheltered open spots in heathland, grassland or woodland. It feeds on caterpillars, worms and small insects.

Fact! Newts are a similar shape to lizards, but they should not be confused – newts are not scaly, are less agile, and prefer to live in damper places.



How Do I Find Them?

You may come across reptiles in their favoured habitats at any time in the warmer parts of the year (they hibernate from October to March). The best time is in spring (April – May) and in September, when they will be basking in sheltered spots to catch the sun (they need to raise their body temperature so that they can become active). The best weather conditions are intermittent or hazy sunshine and cool air temperatures, with little or no wind. "April showers" are fine as long as there are good periods of sunshine between the rain. If you are searching for reptiles in likely spots, move quietly – they can detect the vibrations of your footsteps.

Filling In The Form

Please record any reptile sightings using the form on the back page – feel free to photocopy this, or ask us for more copies of the leaflet. Even if you just see "a snake" that you cannot definitely identify, we would still like to know about it. If you find a sloughed skin or a corpse, you could send that to us as well, with a note of where and when you found it – please ensure that these are appropriately packaged.

