



Slow-worm

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Species English Name(Scientific name)

SLOW-WORM (ANGUIS FRAGILIS)

Associated Habitat Action Plans:

- Heathland



Ecology

Appearance

The slow-worms body is cylindrical, very small scales on its body give the lizard a shiny appearance. Adult females are approximately 400mm in length, males are slightly smaller. The female is brown with longitudinal dark stripes running down both side of her body. Some females have a lighter, central stripe along the back. Dark spotting can occur along the body. The male tends to be more variable in colour from grey to dark brown. Males can have dark spotting along the length of their bodies too, which can lead to confusion between the sexes. Skin is sloughed throughout the year to allow the lizards to grow. This behaviour also helps to get rid of parasites and dirt, helping to keep the skin clean and healthy.

Food

Not much is known about the slow-worms diet, though they seem to prefer soft bodied invertebrates, which include slugs, snails and earthworms.

Habitat

Slow-worms can occur across a wide variety of habitats, which include;
Rough grassland, heathland, moorland, hedgerows, woodland edges, railway/motorway



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embankments, gardens, churchyards and allotments.

Slow-worms like to burrow, as such they are often found in compost and rubble heaps.

Lifestyle

Spring: Slow-worms emerge from hibernation during April. Mating occurs mid-May-June. Gravid (pregnant) females spend more time basking.

Summer: Birth of the young (born live in egg case) occurs throughout the summer.

Autumn: The last of the young are born. This can be as late as early November in some years.

Winter: Hibernating animals. Slow-worms hibernate throughout the winter months in subterranean hibernacula. These must be sufficiently deep to prevent frost.

Current status

The slow-worm is somewhat enigmatic. Although it is a true lizard, the slow-worm has no legs and is commonly mistaken for a snake.

This species is very secretive and is not often seen.

Slow-worms prey on small slugs, earthworms and soft bodied invertebrates. They live beneath rubbish, compost, scrap metal and other suitable debris. Most slow-worms are found by turning over such debris and are rarely seen in the open.

Slow-worms exhibit the widest habitat preference of Britain's reptiles. However, there have been only four records in the Cheshire region since 1995. It is possible that more sites will be discovered as the profile of the slow-worm is raised. Slow-worms were known to occur everywhere in the UK during the 1950's and, although very few records exist, this may be due to the animal's then ubiquitous occurrence. Allotment sites are one of the slow-worms major strongholds in the Cheshire region.

Slow-worms are protected under schedule 5, Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, against intentional injury or killing. Trade in slow-worms is also prohibited. The Slow worm was added to the UKBAP priority in 2007.



Threats

- * Loss of habitat due to constructional development.
- * Loss of habitat due to unsympathetic management.

How are we helping to conserve slow-worms in the Cheshire region?

- * Cheshire and Wirral Amphibian and Reptile Group's Reptiles coordinator has monitored slow-worm populations over a number of years and has contributed to a national publication supported by British Herpetological Society.
- * The Local Records centre, rECOrd, is producing a Provisional Atlas of Amphibian and Reptile sightings. Please send all sightings to rECOrd.

Objectives, targets and actions

Objectives, targets and actions to help conserve the slow worm in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

How to find out more about slow-worms

BBC Wildfacts website - www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildfacts/factfiles/281.shtml
Herpetological Conservation Trust - www.herpconstrust.org.uk/

How can you get involved?

Join the Cheshire and Wirral Amphibian and Reptile Group.
Ask Julian Whitehurst (phone 01829 770797) for details.

Contact details

LBAP Chair Cheshire Wildlife Trust
Phone: 01948 820728

References and Glossary

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