



# AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE SPECIES OF THE DAY



## Here is a little bit of information about a few UK amphibian and reptile species



Many of you have probably come across a **COMMON FROG** hopping around in your garden. Frogs have very **smooth skin** that they must keep hydrated to survive, which is why you find them near or in ponds and any other freshwater body, like streams, rivers, creeks or lakes. Their **colouration varies** through olive green, grey, yellow & brown. However, all frogs have dark irregular blotches as well as a dark stripe around their eyes and eardrum, and dark bars on their legs. They're able to **camouflage** by adapting their skin colour to that of their surroundings – very clever! They can also breathe through their skin, wow! We have only **1729 common frog records** (our 2nd highest scorer for amphibians since 2010).

The **SMOOTH NEWT** (sometimes called 'common' newt') is a species that's quite likely to turn up in your pond, or even out and about in the garden. Look out especially at night when they're most active. Smooth newts feed both in the water (eating invertebrates like molluscs & crustaceans as well as tadpoles) and out the water (eating worms, caterpillars, slugs etc.). They breed in ponds in the Spring, but outside of that can also be found in grasslands, hedgerows, woodland and marshes until they hibernate in winter. Males look different to females, especially in the breeding season, but both have black spots covering their entire body. For mating, males develop a smooth crest that runs the full length of their body and tail. We hold **1719 smooth newt records** (last 10 years), placing it in the top 3 amphibians.



Photo (c) Helen Bradshaw



The **GRASS SNAKE** is the largest of the UK's 3 snake species. Although mostly found in wetland habitats, it also appears in dry grasslands and in gardens if there is a pond close by. Grass snakes **love to bask** in the sun close to their favourite pond and swim in the water! They're also very fond of **compost heaps** and frequently incubate their eggs in them, so please be careful around this area of your garden. Grass snakes normally have a green skin with a black and yellow collar as well as a pale belly and dark markings along the sides. Males tend to be smaller than females. If they spot a predator, they often '**play dead**', making themselves seem like a less appealing meal! We only hold **71 grass snake records** since 2010! Although, not frequently spotted, this species is easy to ID, so please let us know if you see any

Photo (c) Martin Parr





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Although the **SLOW WORM** might look like a snake (and its name might indicate that it's a worm), it's actually a **legless lizard!** Just like other lizards, slow worms have eyelids to blink and can even drop their own tail when threatened! One of the best places to look for slow worms is snuggled up or on the hunt for invertebrates inside a **cosy compost heap**. Slow worm skin is smooth and golden-grey. **Females are bigger** than males and have dark sides as well as a dark stripe running down the back, whilst males are paler and can have blue spots. The slow worm also **'gives birth'** to its young rather than incubating the eggs. Mating can last up to ten hours! The male holds on to the female by biting her in the neck or head and they then intertwine their bodies. The slow worm is our **MOST RECORDED Cheshire reptile, with 351 records (last 10 years).**

The **COMMON LIZARD** is the **most common and widespread reptile** in the UK. Its found in a **variety of habitats**, like grasslands, heathlands, woodlands & moorlands, but there's always a small chance it might turn up in gardens. Common lizards incubate their eggs inside the body and then **'give birth'** to 3-11 young. The skin of the common lizard is generally brownish-grey, although this might vary, with rows of darker spots and stripes along the sides and back. The undersides of males tend to be bright orange/yellow whereas females tend to have paler bellies. When they're **threatened, they can drop their tail** to distract the attacker as the tail carries on moving! We only have **214 records for the common lizard** in the last 10 years, do let us know if you see any.

Photo (c) Steve McWilliam



Unlike the common frog, the skin of the **COMMON TOAD** is warty and often appears **dry**. Their skin colour is usually brown or olive-brown, but this varies as it does with the common frog. Toad skin also has **glands** containing a very powerful toxin to deter predators. You're super lucky if you spot a toad in your garden as they're declining across the UK. We hold **901 common toad records (last 10 years)** – an average of only 90 records per year or 7.5 records per month!

Photo (c) Leanna Dixon

**GREAT CRESTED NEWTS** are protected by the law and you need a licence to survey them, move them or take pictures, so please be careful if you have them in your garden! The behaviour of great crested newts is the same as that of most other newt species: breeding occurs in spring in ponds, soon after they disperse to feed on invertebrates as much as they can until it's time for **hibernation** in the winter. The great crested newt is the **UK's biggest newt!** Their skin is almost black with spots on the flanks and a striking orange belly. They're also covered in **warts** and males **develop a long wavy crest** along their entire body when it's time to find a mate. When it's time to breed, males stand on their front legs arching their back and waving their tail around, almost as if they were **dancing!** Individual 'cresties' can be ID'd by looking at the **unique patterns** of the black spots on their bellies. The great crested newt is our **top record scorer in the amphibian group with a total of 3,102 records.** Most records will come from newt surveys carried out by ecologists and partners.



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