

'Be ye therefore wise as serpents...'

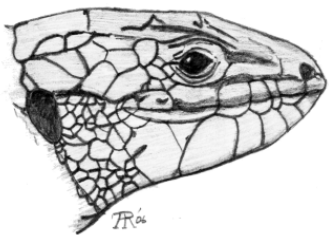
Matt. 10:16

Reptiles (snakes, lizards etc) are 'cold blooded' animals, which means that neither lizards nor snakes can maintain their body temperature internally like mammals and birds do. Instead they need to maintain a constant temperature by sun bathing, and then moving into shade when they are too hot. The advantage of this is that little internal energy needs to be used for general activity and they can therefore survive for long periods with very little food. However, being cold-blooded does mean that reptiles need to hibernate during colder parts of the year; often an underground hole is chosen, as they cannot cope with the colder months.

Species on Shotover

Zootoca vivipara

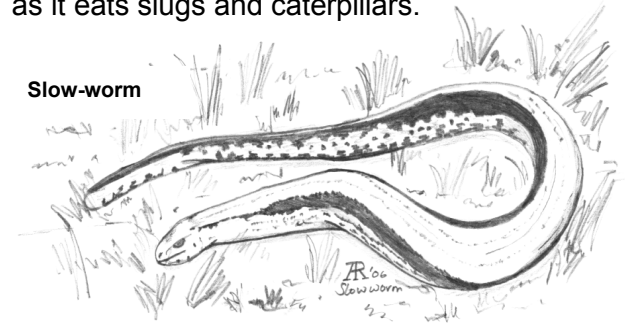
The Common Lizard, also known as the Viviparous Lizard is variable in colour, but typically brown to brownish green with black stripes running down the back. This stripe is continuous in the females, and 'blotchy' in the males. The young are almost completely black. The Viviparous Lizard can be seen in summer on Shotover's heathland basking in the sun and clambering over the vegetation. The diet of this lizard is made up solely of invertebrates. This species can grow up to 14cm. They are superbly camouflaged and move quickly, so you have to look carefully and move quietly if you want to see one.



Common Lizard

Anguis fragilis

The Slow-worm looks very much like a snake, but is in fact a legless lizard. This species can grow to 30cm long and its colouration is variable: from grey (males) to brown and black with a black line running down its back (females), young Slow-worms are golden brown. As a defence to predators, the tip of the tail drops off when seized surprising the Kestrel or Fox, or even an interested child, left with a wiggling tail instead of the whole lizard. By the time the predator realises, the Slow-worm will be long gone. Many lizards can use this trick, including the Common Lizard. This reptile is a good garden companion as it eats slugs and caterpillars.



Natrix natrix

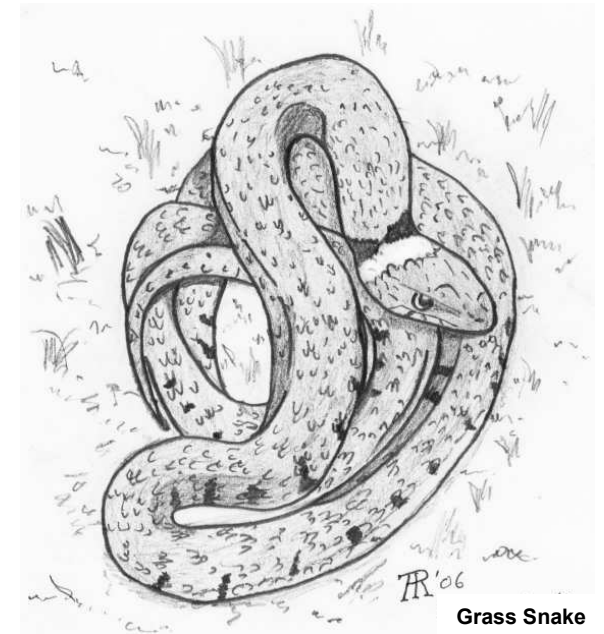
The Grass Snake is Britain's most common snake and is probably the only snake that lives and breeds on Shotover. This attractive snake is olive green in colour with yellow markings on its neck, which leads to its other name of the Collared Snake. They can reach great lengths, sometimes up to an amazing 1.5 metres. They are good swimmers and will often swim to escape from predators or to hunt for fish and frogs: they also eat small mammals. The Grass Snake is not dangerous to humans and can often be found in gardens.

Life-cycles

The snakes and lizards on Shotover are most active in spring and summer when they hunt and reproduce. The Grass Snake's mating behaviour

occurs between April and early June, with egg laying occurring from then to early August. Grass Snakes are particularly fond of grass piles to lay their eggs, which are incubated by the heat from the decomposing grass. These eggs will hatch between September and October.

Unlike the Grass Snake, both the Common Lizard and the Slow Worm give birth to live young. Their season for mating and giving birth is similar to that of the Grass Snake; however the Common Lizard, which is a resilient and hardy species, can withstand colder conditions and will begin mating earlier, in March.



Grass Snake

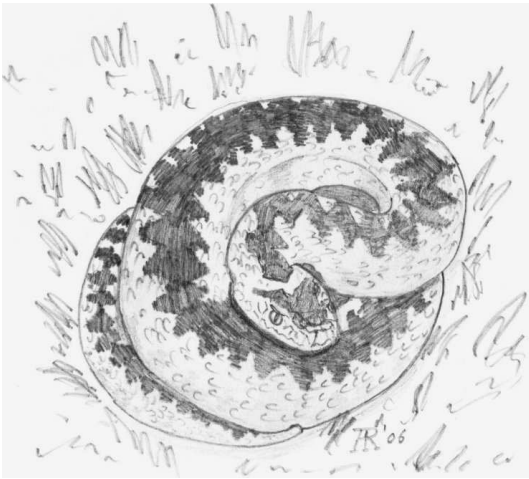
After the summer months of activity, the reptiles begin the search for a place to hibernate. These hibernation spots are known as refugia and will be the reptile's home during the much colder months. They will remain dormant until the following spring. These refugia can be anything from an unused mammal burrow to a pile of wood.

Conservation

Management of Shotover's heathland is an ongoing project, which promotes quality habitat for reptiles. This creates hibernation sites, stabilising and hopefully increasing populations of all species of reptile on Shotover. For example, the Slow-worm used to be very common, but now a national decline is feared, so any effort to encourage this species on Shotover is of great value. SW members are carrying out ongoing reptile surveys to increase our understanding of the needs of Shotover's reptiles.

The Legendary Adder (*Vipera berus*)

The Adder, one of Britain's rarest snakes characterized by its 'zigzag' pattern, is declining due to habitat loss. This reptile is a heathland specialist and Shotover is the perfect habitat for this animal. However, the Adder has not been seen with any certainty in the SSSI for about 50 years; none the less, reports of adder sightings are often received and perhaps, hidden on the heath are a few remaining individuals of a lost population.

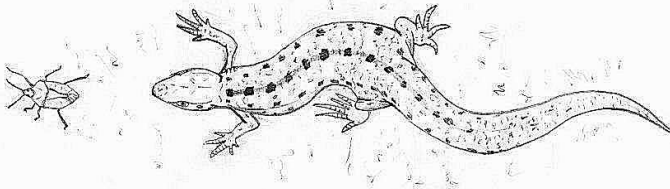


Reptiles on Shotover

65 million years ago dinosaurs ruled the earth, and although these prehistoric reptiles have been long extinct, their relatives are still around today.

Reptiles have an ancient past and the numerous species around the world have evolved to live in all habitats, excluding the very coldest extremes. On Shotover the heathland on the hill is the best place to see reptiles.

There are six species of reptile that live in the UK, three of which occur on Shotover and you can read about them in this leaflet.



Shotover Wildlife is a voluntary organisation founded to research and communicate the importance of Shotover Hill for wildlife

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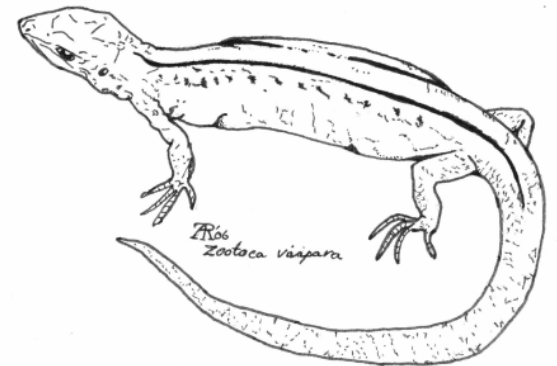
Related leaflet titles:

Amphibians Geology
Conservation Work Days Heathland

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REPTILES on SHOTOVER



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