

Amphibians and reptiles



Introduction

Churchyards can be great places for amphibians and reptiles, and especially important for slow-worms and common lizard which have declined elsewhere. If the churchyard is close to ponds you may even find common frogs, common toads and newts. Open sunny spots as well as sheltered areas such as hedge bases and longer grass areas provide food and shelter.



Common frog by Mark Hamblin/2020VISION

Did you know?

Unlike frogs, toads don't hop, but walk, and if disturbed will often sit very still. This helps to distinguish the two species.

The smooth newt is occasionally mistaken for a lizard and their skin can look velvety when they are on land.

The common lizard incubates its eggs internally without laying shelled eggs.

A slow-worm is in fact a lizard with no legs and has a flat forked tongue.

The importance of churchyards for amphibians and reptiles

Churchyards add to a network of green sites, such as meadows and gardens, enabling the movement of species such as these through the landscape. The mosaic of habitats in churchyards including grassland of varying lengths, hedgerows, piles of dead leaves, compost heaps, tombstones and scrubby areas provide good homes for amphibians and reptiles. Look out for common frog, common toad, smooth newt, common lizard, grass snake and slow-worm.

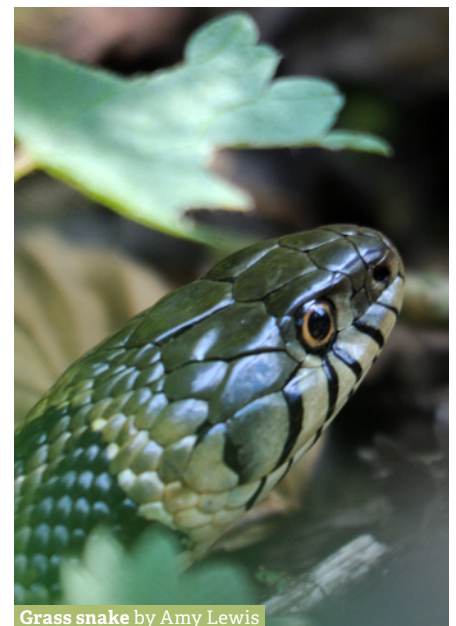
For further information please visit the NWT website or contact:

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Grass snake by Amy Lewis

Where to find amphibians and reptiles



Common lizard by Amy Lewis

Common lizard

The common lizard is a colourful character, being a shade of brown with patterns of spots or stripes. Colour variants are not uncommon: everything from yellow through various shades of green to jet black can be encountered. Check out open sunny spots near dense cover, but be quick, they tend to move fast when discovered.



Common frog by Guy Edwardes/2020VISION

Frog

Frogs have slender bodies, smooth skin and jump and hop, whereas toads have more bulbous bodies, dry, warty skin and tend to crawl. Frog's hind legs are long with webbed feet. They have a distinctive brown patch behind their eye. Their skin colour varies from grey, green and yellow to shades of brown. Check out hedge bases, long grass and woodland edges to see them.



Slow worm by Amy Lewis

Slow-worm

The slow-worm has a smooth and shiny snake-like body. Typically brown, grey or even reddish or coppery in colour. Females tend to have a vertical stripe and rather dark sides and belly, males are more uniform. Newborns are a striking gold or silvery colour. Check out compost heaps, wood piles, tree roots and crevices.

How to help

- Leave longer tussocky grass around tombstones and monuments, as well as a strip along the walls of the churchyard. This long grass habitat provides great places for reptiles and amphibians to hide and shelter. Leaving scrub and longer grass next to hedgerows is also beneficial.
- Make a dead wood pile: when wood rots away, the amount of food increases.
- Maintain some open sunny areas, as although slow-worms like to stay under cover in grassy areas, it is vital that the ground is warmed by the sun enough for slow worms to be active. Slow worms need to keep a warm body temperature to digest food and for the young to develop in the female.
- Create a compost heap in a sunny location. Grass snakes lay their eggs in warm, moist areas to help incubation; plus compost heaps attract slugs, worms and snails which are a good food source.
- When carrying out any cutting check the area is clear before beginning.



Churchyard by David North