

REPTILES *All native species*

Four reptile species are found in Cumbria: Common Lizard *Lacerta vivipara*, Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* (a legless lizard), Grass Snake *Natrix natrix* and Adder *Vipera berus*. All are protected by UK legislation. The greatest threats to reptiles in Cumbria are from habitat loss and fragmentation due to unsympathetic management and development.

Contents

[Legal and Conservation Status](#)

[Habitat](#)

[Ecology](#)

[Distribution](#)

[Conservation Issues](#)

[Planning Considerations](#)

[Enhancement Opportunities](#)

[Further Information](#)

[Contacts](#)

[Current Action in Cumbria](#)



Viviparous Lizard © David Hickson

Legal and Conservation Status

- All are UK protected species
- All are UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species and Species of Principal Importance in England

Cumbria's native reptiles are protected under:

- Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), in respect of sections 9(1) as far as it relates to killing and injuring and in respect of section 9(5) (Schedule 5)

It is an offence to:

- Intentionally kill or injure a Common Lizard, Adder, Grass Snake or Slow-worm

(This is a summary of the main points of the law, not a complete statement.)

Habitat

Reptiles require habitat with good structural diversity providing basking areas, feeding opportunities and hibernation sites.

Being cold-blooded they need to be able to bask to raise their body temperature. The open, dry nature of heathlands, limestone and acid grasslands, and the rough grasslands of roadside verges and railway embankments often provide these basking areas, as well as plenty of cover and food. In the urban environment many previously developed land (brownfield) sites, particularly associated with the coastal strip in Cumbria, and allotments, can provide suitable habitat for high densities of reptiles. The exception is the Grass Snake, which



Adder, Drigg Dunes © Stephen Hewitt

has more affinity with wetland habitats.

Adders are most often found on heathland and lowland bogs.

Common Lizards have broad habitat requirements. They have been reported from brownfield sites, allotments, coastal sand dunes, sheltered woodland clearings, lowland mires, heathland, limestone pavement and open fellsides up to an altitude of 600m as well as rough grasslands of previously developed land and other man made habitats.

Grass Snakes are often associated with wetland areas and ponds, where they feed on frogs, but they range over large areas and can be found away from water in open woodland and scrub as well as gardens.



Grass Snake © Stephen Hewitt

The **Slow-worm** is found throughout the county in open woods, lightly-managed grassland including gardens, churchyards, allotments, roadside verges, and post industrial land, up to an altitude of about 300m. The open, rock-strewn woodlands of some Lakeland valleys also provide suitable conditions. The highest densities of slow-worms can often be found in under-utilised allotments.



Slow-worm © Stephen Hewitt

Cumbria Key Habitats that are particularly important for the above species include:

Heathland

Bogs

Calcareous grassland

Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land

Coastal habitats above high water

Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh

Limestone pavements

Semi-natural woodlands

Lakes, ponds and tarns

Ecology

British reptiles are inactive from about mid-October to March hibernating below ground in disused mammal burrows, inside buried stonework, deep within grass tussocks or among tree roots. When they emerge in the spring they can often be seen basking in the open. Adders from a large area may hibernate together and therefore a few hibernation sites can be vital to the survival of a whole population.

Slow-worms and Common Lizards live mostly on invertebrates – insects, spiders and small slugs and snails. The two snakes hunt by stealth, preying on amphibians, small mammals and even their smaller reptilian cousins.

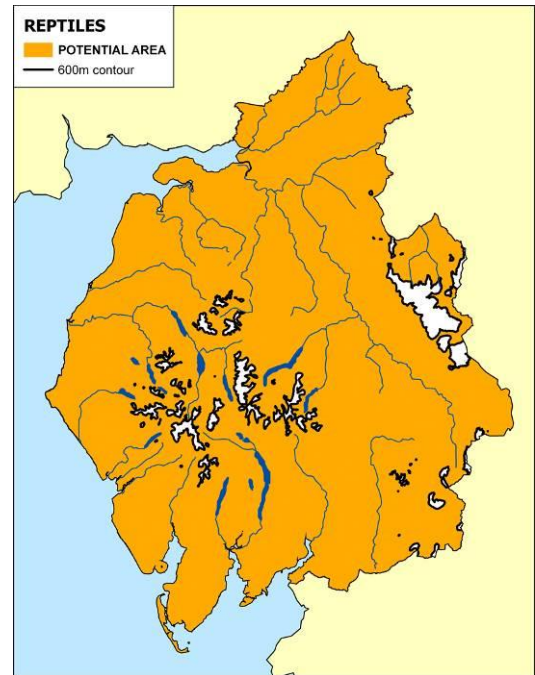
Reptiles lay eggs with leathery shells that do not dry out on land, and so do not require water in order to breed. However of the four species in Cumbria only the Grass Snake actually lays eggs, frequently in compost heaps. The other species are able to develop the eggs inside the body and give birth to live young. This is particularly useful for reptiles living in our cool, northern climate as the pregnant females are able to move into warm situations to promote the development of the young inside them.

Distribution

All reptiles are under-recorded. Common Lizards and Slow-worms are likely to occur on most lowland previously developed land sites and lightly-managed grassland. Adders occur at low density over much of Cumbria in natural or semi-natural habitats. Grass Snakes are probably confined to south Cumbria and the coastal strip.

Conservation Issues

Development and unsuitable land management have reduced the amount of habitat available for reptiles. Reptiles require habitat with good structural diversity providing basking areas, adequate feeding opportunities and hibernation sites. These features are often reduced through intensive mowing, over-grazing, burning (accidental or deliberate), intensive recreational use or simply scrub colonisation.



Fragmentation of populations can be caused by roads or urban development, as well as by more subtle features such as ploughed fields or expanses of short mown grass.

Persecution may still be a significant cause of decline for Adder, Grass Snake and Slow-worm; the Adder is the only venomous snake but the other species may be erroneously considered to be a danger to the public.

Planning Considerations

- Any proposed development that may affect reptiles would require a reptile survey.
- Surveys for reptiles and their use of habitat cannot be carried out adequately during the winter months. This may mean that decisions have to be delayed until after a suitable survey window.
- Any development that would impact upon reptiles and their habitat would require adequate protection and mitigation measures.

Enhancement Opportunities

- Creation of wildlife corridors through urban and semi-urban spaces could include open grassland habitat, sown with native species and with structural diversity, e.g. rock and wood refuge piles, built in for reptiles.
- Species-rich grasslands on previously developed land could be enhanced for reptiles to form core areas of reptile habitat.
- Creation of refuges/over-wintering sites to enhance existing sites.

Further Information

[Herpetofauna Workers Manual](#)

[Reptiles: surveys and mitigation for development projects](#)

[Pre-submission screening service: advice on planning proposals affecting protected species](#)

[Protected species: how to review planning applications](#)

[ARC Trust](#)

Contacts

National:

- **Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust**, 655A Christchurch Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth, Dorset BH1 4AP. Tel: 01202 391319. Email: enquiries@arc-trust.org

Local:

- **Natural England**, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Rd, Kendal, Cumbria. LA9 7RL. Tel: 0300 060 3900

Current Action in Cumbria

None.

