

Legless lizards and relatives on Troopers Hill

Troopers Hill provides a home for the Common Lizard and the Slow-worm, 2 of the 3 kinds of lizard that are native to the British Isles.

The Common Lizard starts coming out of hibernation in March, having been hibernating since October. The earliest we have seen one on Troopers Hill was 8th March. The Hill is a great source of food for Common Lizards and provides lots of cover. They mainly eat insects, their larvae and spiders. Lizards in turn make a tasty morsel for some birds, badgers, foxes and household cats. They do have the handy escape mechanism of being able to drop their tails and eventually grow a new one.



The Common Lizard does not lay eggs. The second part of their scientific name, vivipara, means “bringing forth young in a live state”. The young lizards are delivered in sacs, up to 10 being born at a time.

Common Lizards mate in during April and May. Records show young being born from late June to early September. It takes almost two years for the male to become adult. Their lifespan is about 6 years.

Slow-worms (*Anguis fragilis*) are our legless lizards. The males have a range of colours and can look like copper or golden; the females may have a dark stripe or be flecked or striped with dark brown or black. All of them have very smooth scales which make them look highly polished.

They also hibernate but are ovoviviparous; the young develop and hatch from eggs inside the mother. Unlike the Common Lizard, apart from pregnant females coming out to bask in the sun in late summer, the Slow-worm is not often seen in daylight, preferring to hide under stones, logs, leaves or in holes in the ground. Any gardener should treasure their Slow-worms; they love eating slugs.

Mating occurs from late April to June with males fighting each other during that time, sometimes wounding each other severely. Usually the young, numbering 6-12 as an average litter, are born in August and September. They take 3-5 years to reach sexual maturity but can take 7 or 8 years to achieve their full growth. They may live up to 30 years in the wild but they frequently fall victim to the same predators as Common Lizards.

It is illegal to deliberately kill, injure or trade either of these reptiles.

Sometimes we are lucky enough to be supervised by a Common Lizard during a conservation work party. The one in the photo was just sunning itself on the heather, while we worked away.

Why not come to our next conservation work party and found out more about what makes Troopers Hill so very special?

There is a conservation work party on the 1st Saturday and 3rd Thursday of every month, starting promptly at 10am and finishing at noon. The volunteers meet by the red slide on Troopers Hill Field.