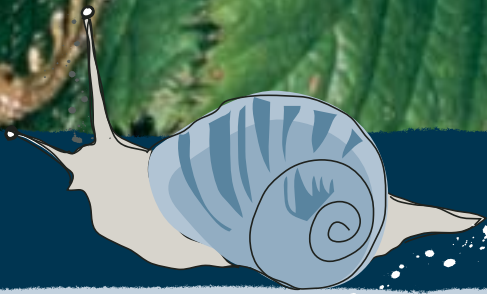


Reptiles



Aims of the Reptile Action Plan

- To protect and conserve native reptile populations in Lambeth.
- To promote wider awareness of reptiles and reptile conservation in Lambeth.

A) What reptiles are found in London?

Four species of reptile are known to occur in London: the common lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*), the slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*) – a legless lizard, and two snakes, the grass snake (*Natrix natrix*) and adder (*Vipera berus*). Whilst lizards and grass snakes are still fairly widespread, adders are exceedingly rare in London, and are found at only a handful of sites.

Being cold-blooded, reptiles need warm sites for basking to raise body temperature. The open, dry nature of heathlands and chalk and acid grasslands usually provide these basking areas, as well as plenty of cover and food, and are habitats with which most reptiles in London are commonly associated. The exception to this is the grass snake, which has more affinity with wetland habitats.



Slow worm (Anguis fragilis), which occurs in Lambeth. Copyright: Pat Morris/ardea.com

British reptiles are inactive between mid-October and March, hibernating below ground in disused burrows, inside stonework, within grass tussocks or among tree roots. On emergence from hibernation in the spring, these reptiles can often be seen basking out in the open.

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.



Common lizard (Lacerta vivipara), which occurs in Lambeth. Copyright: J.B. & S. Bottomley/ardea.com

B) Where can we find reptiles in Lambeth?

Adders are very rare in London, and are not known anywhere in Lambeth. Grass snakes occur in Lambeth as in many outer London boroughs, but populations are declining as a result of habitat fragmentation and loss of wetland sites to development. Their yellow collar, a prominent feature even in hatchlings, easily identifies grass snakes.

Being mobile, grass snakes are possibly over-recorded and turn up almost anywhere, including in Lambeth, but are found typically in gardens around ponds, preying on frogs and toads, and in compost heaps where they use the warmth to incubate their eggs.

Common lizards, widespread across London, certainly occur in Lambeth, especially along wildlife corridors like the Borough's railway embankments. Slow-worms occur in Lambeth, along railsides and road verges, allotments, wasteland or 'brownfield' sites and in private gardens where grass has been allowed to grow long.

C) Why do we need an Action Plan for reptiles?

Loss of suitable habitat and changes in land use has significantly reduced the amount of habitat available in London and UK for many 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 (whether accidental or deliberate), or intensive recreational use.

Reptile populations have become isolated from one another as well as other areas of habitat to colonise. This occurs through fragmentation of suitable habitat by barriers that reptiles cannot cross. These include physical barriers like roads or urban development, but also more subtle barriers like ploughed fields or short mown grass.

Snakes have long been persecuted across Britain because their 'poisonous' reputation gives them a bad media image portraying them as villainous or lethal predators of man. Adder, grass snake and slow-worm (often mistaken for a snake but in fact a legless lizard) suffer from this negative image.

Some land managers over-react to liability concerns over public safety and potential dangers to pets from snake bites. Action to remove the threat by destroying reptile habitat, and/or illegal killing, can contribute to local declines in snake populations.

D) What is the legal status of reptiles?

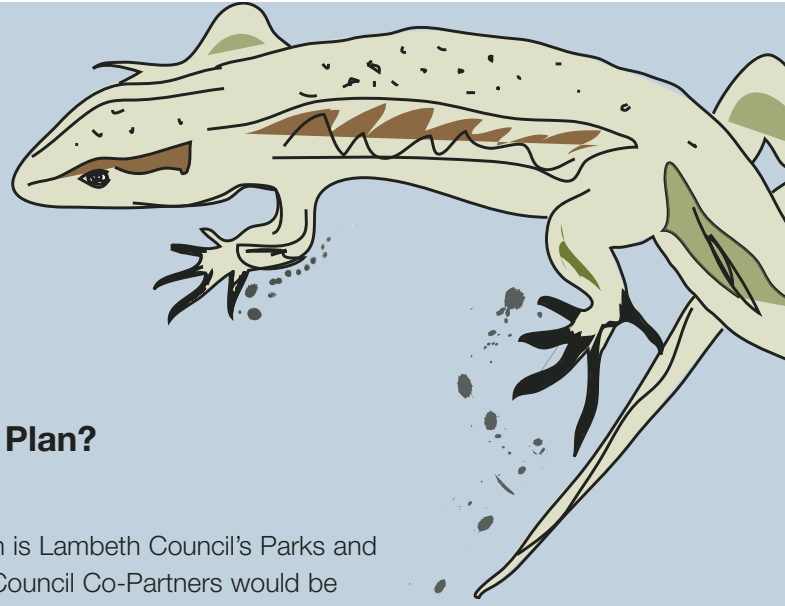
The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 protect all British reptiles to various degrees. London's reptiles are protected from intentional killing and injury, selling or other forms of trade. Damage to reptile habitat is not specifically referred to in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Many important reptile habitats in London are protected by virtue of their status as a statutory Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Local or National Nature Reserve (LNR, NNR). Others are safeguarded from inappropriate development through designation as non-statutory Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). Lambeth has large number of SINCs, and thus reptile species in them are safeguarded as a consequence.

E) What will the Reptile Action Plan do?

Objective 1. We will improve knowledge of reptile distribution and abundance in Lambeth; data for relevant organisations, including that needed to assist in updating the Herpetofauna Atlas of London, will be distributed by 2007.

Objective 2. We will promote reptile conservation in Lambeth to land owners, land managers, community groups and general public. Advice notes and a best practice toolkit will be disseminated to all relevant stakeholders by 2007.



F) Who is involved in the Reptile Action Plan?

1. Partnerships

The Lead Partner for the Lambeth Reptile Action Plan is Lambeth Council's Parks and Greenspaces Business Unit (Lambeth Parks). Other Council Co-Partners would be Lambeth Planning, along with the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contractor.

The Lead Community Partner will be the London, Essex and Hertfordshire Amphibian and Reptile Trust (LEHART).

Other Partners include the London Wildlife Trust, the Greater London Authority, London Natural History Society and the Herpetofaunal Conservation Trust.

2. Contact for information

For more information on the Lambeth Reptile Action Plan, including copies of this plan in paper or electronic format, please contact:

Dr Iain Boulton, Environmental Education Officer

Lambeth Parks & Greenspaces

4th Floor Blue Star House, 234-244 Stockwell Road, London SW9 9SP

Tel: 020 7926 6209; **Fax:** 020 7926 6201; **email:** iboulton@lambeth.gov.uk

3. Further information and advice

Further advice on British reptiles, their ecology and conservation, and the management of habitats to protect and support British reptiles, can be found on the following websites.

- DEFRA (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/>)
- Herpetological Conservation Trust (<http://www.hcontrst.force9.co.uk/noframes/about.htm>)
- London Wildlife Trust (<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/>)
- Greater London Authority (<http://www.london.gov.uk/>)
- Metropolitan Police Wildlife Crime Unit (http://www.met.police.uk/wildlife/new_site_docs/docs/)
- English Nature (<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/default.asp>)
- Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) (<http://www.ptes.org/>)

The London, Essex and Hertfordshire Amphibian and Reptile Trust (LEHART), Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group (SARG) and Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group (KRAG) undertake surveys, provide advice on habitat management, and promote reptile conservation in London. They maintain databases of site records.

Other organisations like the London Wildlife Trust, Froglife and English Nature produce information notes and leaflets about British reptiles and their conservation. Recent public awareness campaigns, such as 'Be Kind To Snakes', have attempted to change the image of British reptiles, and popular interest in them is slowly growing.