

# Reptile Identification



## Viviparous lizard

Adults 13-15 cm. Coloration and markings variable. Background coloration generally brown.

Males tend to have a flecked pattern on back.

Some individuals have solid coloration of brown, black.

Occasionally green, leading to mistaken identification as sand lizard.

Females tend to have stripes.

Male

Female

Young male

Newborn young are dark in colour, almost black. 4 cm.

## Sand lizard

Larger and more heavily-built than viviparous lizard. Adults 16-19 cm. Most have three rows of eyespots, one along the back, one on either flank.

A rare species, almost entirely confined to heathland sites in Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey, and sand dunes on the Mersey Coast.

Breeding male has vivid green flanks (late spring).

Male

Female

Strictly protected, requiring a licence to handle or disturb.

## Wall lizard

A non-native species found at relatively few, but an increasing number of, sites mainly in southern England.

Grows to 17-18 cm, but most of length is tail. Body length 6 cm. Some have bright green mottling on the back, others are brown.

Prefers south-facing, vertical habitat such as walls and cliffs.

amphibian and reptile  
conservation



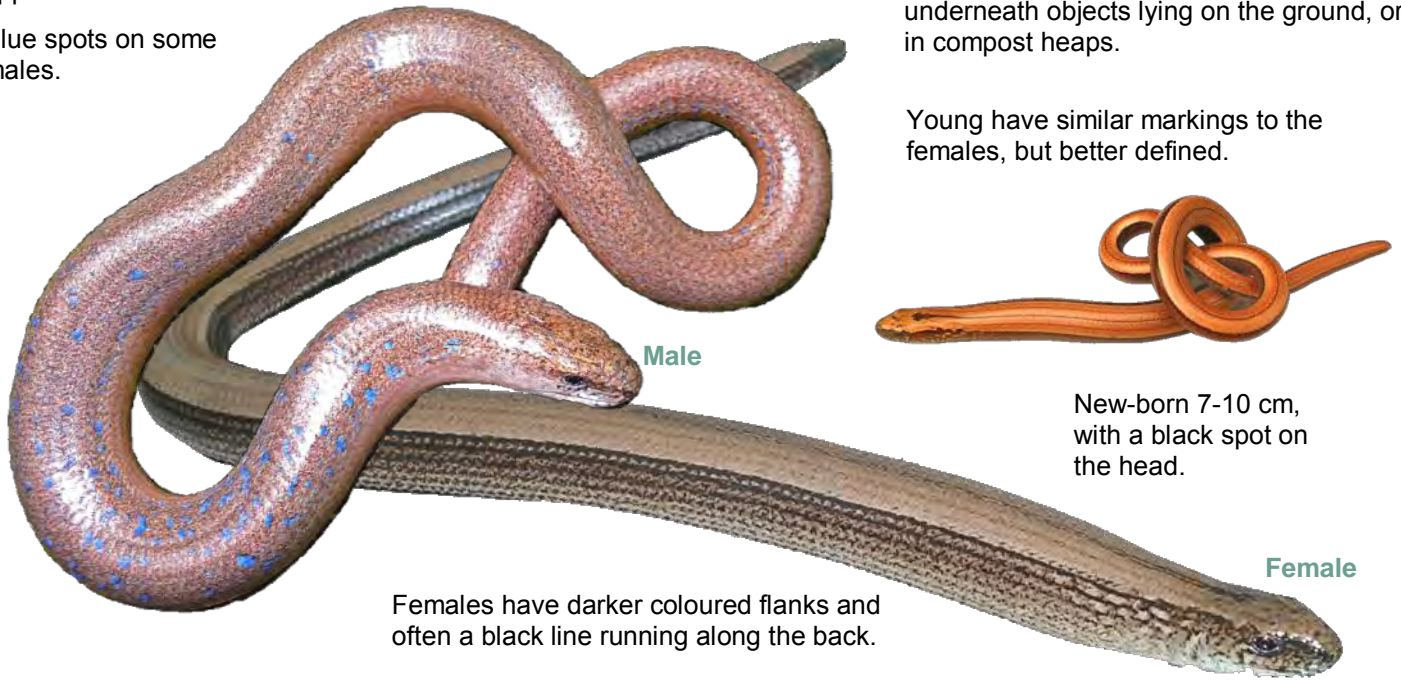
## Slow-worm

Adults 35-40 cm. Generally grey or brown, very rarely black. Small, shiny scales, giving a metallic appearance.

Blue spots on some males.

The most common reptile in the UK, found in a variety of habitats, including gardens. It spends most of its time underground or in vegetation litter. Most likely to be found underneath objects lying on the ground, or in compost heaps.

Young have similar markings to the females, but better defined.



Male

Female

Females have darker coloured flanks and often a black line running along the back.

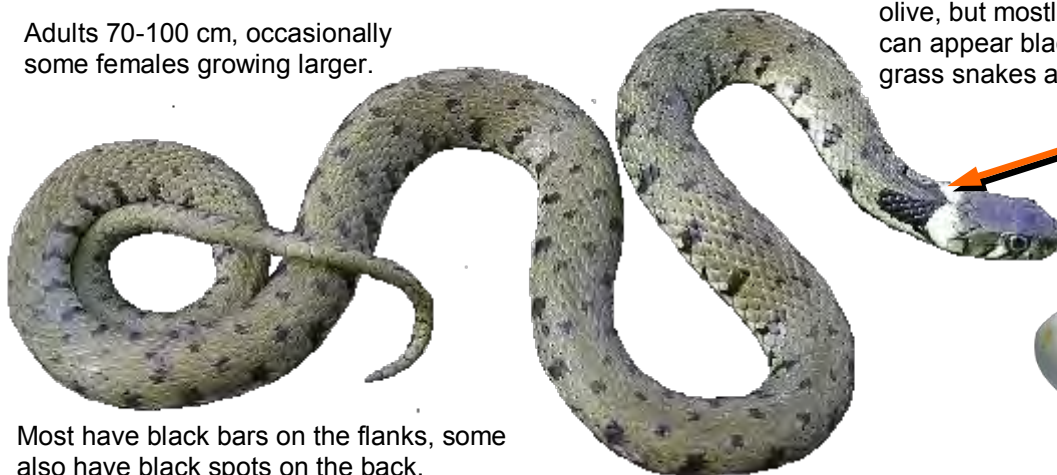
New-born 7-10 cm, with a black spot on the head.

## Grass snake

Adults 70-100 cm, occasionally some females growing larger.

Body colour ranges from bright green to dark olive, but mostly the latter. Darker specimens can appear black from a distance. Truly black grass snakes are very rare.

Cream, yellow or white collar behind the head, bordered to the rear by black marks.

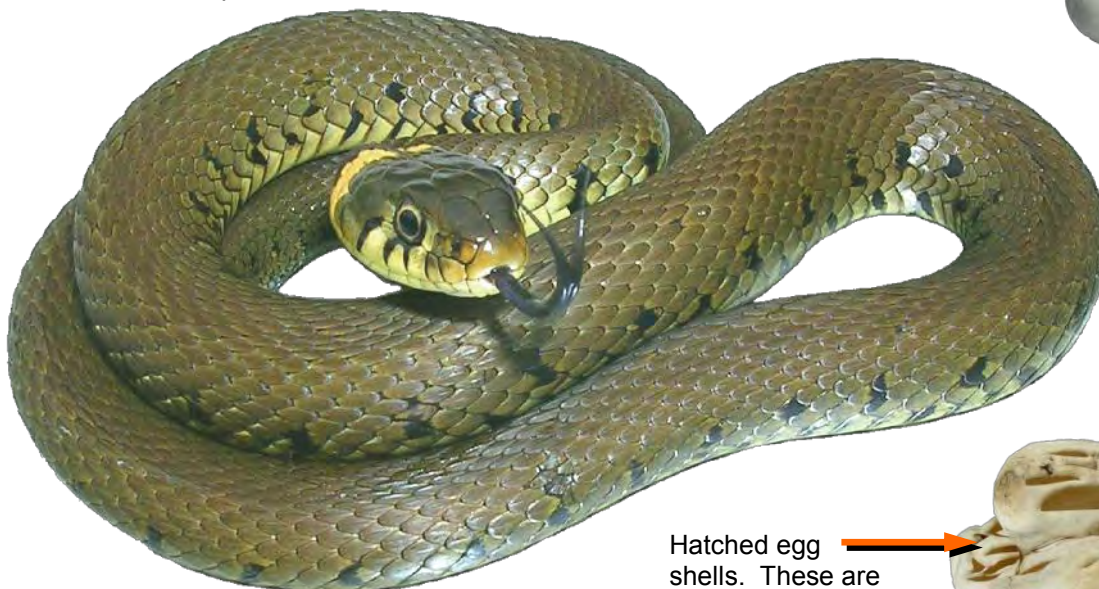


Most have black bars on the flanks, some also have black spots on the back.



**Eggs** 2.5 cm long, Laid in clutches of 10-40, usually stuck together. Several females may deposit clutches in the same place (usually in decomposing material such as compost or manure heap).

Hatched egg shells. These are very persistent and may remain up to a year after hatching.

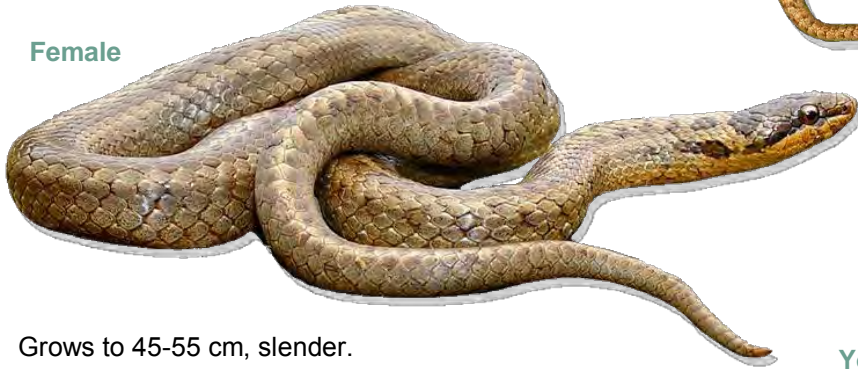


Hatchlings 16-20 cm with similar markings to adults. Appear late August to September.

## Smooth snake

Restricted to heathlands in Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey. Males predominately brown, females grey. Dark butterfly shape on top of head. Pairs of spots, sometimes fused as bars, running along back. Black line running through eye.

Female



Grows to 45-55 cm, slender. Strictly protected, requiring a licence to handle or disturb.

Male



Young 14-16 cm, resemble adults but with better defined markings.



## Adder

Female



Wide distribution, but restricted to specific habitats (heathland, down, scrub, woodland edge, road and rail embankments).

A stocky snake, adults 40-70 cm.

Male



Variable coloration. Males typically grey with a black zigzag stripe, females generally brown with a dark brown zigzag stripe. Black adders are found in some areas.

Young

New-born 16 cm. Some young are brick-red, others have similar coloration to adults.



## Head profiles

Slow-worm

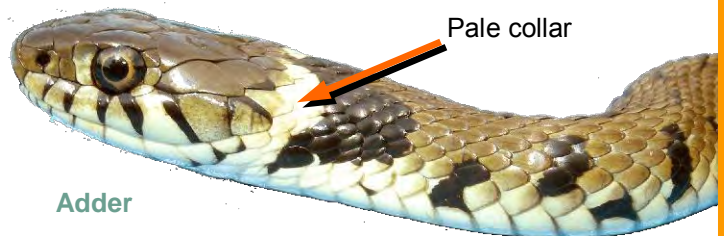


Smooth snake



Line through eye

Grass snake



Pale collar

Adder



Vertical pupil

Note that many snake species are kept as pets and so escaped or released non-native snakes are occasionally encountered.

# Reptile sloughs

Reptiles periodically shed (slough) their skins, to allow for growth and to replace ageing tissue. The shed (sloughed) skins can be useful in identifying species.

## Lizards

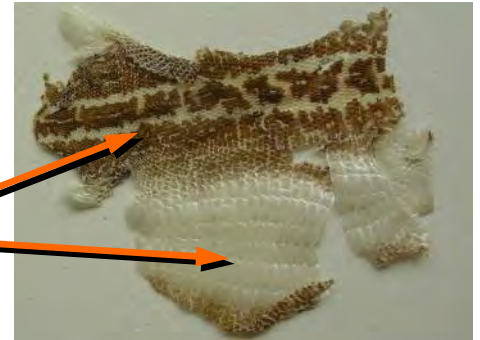


**Viviparous lizard** (left)

**Sand lizard** (right)

Skin sloughed in fragments, often much smaller than those shown.

Dorsal (back) pattering evident. Large scales on ventral surface (underside) – but single scales not spanning the width of the body.



**Slow-worm** (right)

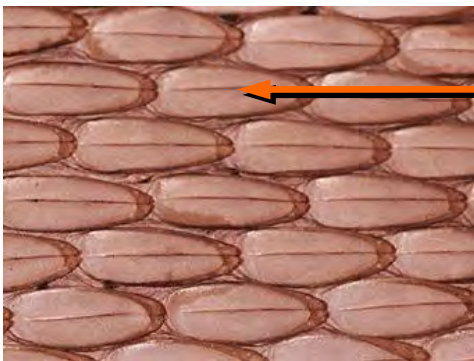
Uniformly small scales on dorsal and ventral surfaces.



Shed pieces of skin are rolled up, like a removed sock.

## Snakes

Large ventral scales (underneath), spanning the width of the body.



**Grass snake**

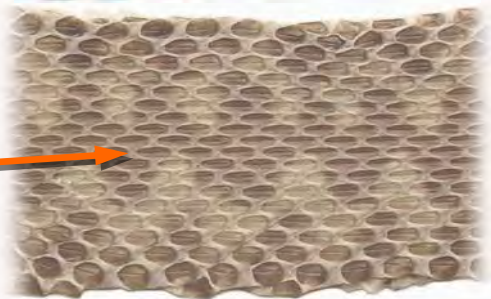
- Keel on dorsal scales.
- Divided anal/pre-anal scale.
- Large plates on head (e.g. behind eye).

**Underside of grass snake**



**Adder**

- Dorsal zigzag pattern usually visible, especially when viewed on light background.
- Keel on dorsal scales.
- Large plates, but also small scales, on head (e.g. behind eye).
- Undivided anal/pre-anal scale.

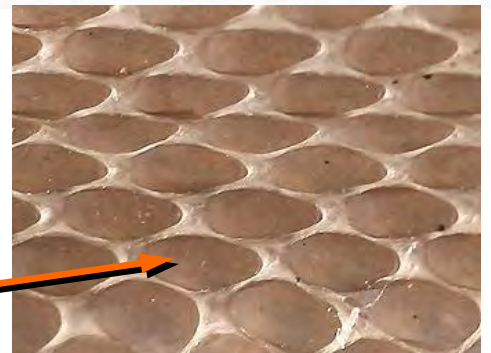


Grass snake

Adder

**Smooth snake**

- No obvious markings on slough and no keel on dorsal scales.



## Sexing snakes

Male snakes have relatively longer tails than do females – hence males have more ventral tail (sub-caudal) scales. These are easily counted on sloughed skins.

Adder		Grass snake		Smooth snake	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
32-46	24-38	61-73	49-64	50-64	43-57

Source: Beebee, TJC and Griffiths, RA (2000). *Amphibians and Reptiles. A Natural History of the British Herpetofauna.* The New Naturalist Library.