

## Native British Snakes

There are three native species (grass snake, adder and smooth snake) and one legless lizard (slow-worm), which may be confused for a snake. All species are currently in decline mainly due to habitat loss. **All snakes in the UK are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 5 and it is an offence to kill, injure or take a native snake.**

**If you find a native snake – leave it alone.**

### Grass Snake - *Natrix natrix*

Grass snakes are non-venomous and have a yellow, black and cream collar around the neck, and a round eye. Colours may vary, but are typically olive green, with black bars. They can be up to 150cm (5ft), but are usually around 75cms (2 1/2ft)

Grass snakes may visit your garden pond because they mainly feed on amphibians and fish but they are harmless to humans. Compost heaps in gardens may be used as egg-laying sites, if so the young will appear in late August and September.



### Adder (*Vipera berus*)

Adders typically grow to around 55 cm (2 ft) and have a distinctive zigzag pattern running along the length of their back. Female snakes are usually brown with dark brown markings and male snakes are normally grey or buff with black markings.

They are mainly found on rough grassland and heath land. Adders do not lay eggs or make nests. They give birth in late summer or early autumn

They are the only venomous snake in the UK, but because the venom is designed to kill small animals like voles it is not particularly potent. You are more likely to be harmed by bees or horses. However, if you are bitten by an adder it is advisable to seek medical assistance immediately



### Smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*)



Smooth snakes are slender and normally grow to around 55 cm (2 ft). They are grey or grey-brown with darker markings along their back and usually a 'butterfly' shape on the top of their head. They are very rare in the UK. It would be very unusual to find a smooth snake in your garden.

### Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*)

The slow-worm is in fact a lizard, but it has no legs and it is often mistaken for a snake. They are smaller than our native snakes, usually growing to about 40 cm (16 inches). The scales are small and smooth, giving slow-worms a shiny or polished appearance. Female and juvenile snakes tend to have a golden-brown background with a thin black line running along their back. Adult males tend to have a duller brown/grey background and usually lack the darker stripe. Slow-worms are fairly widespread in the UK and are often found in grassland and heathland. They can be quite common in urban/suburban areas and are most likely to be found in gardens and allotments. They feed largely on slugs and are therefore useful visitors to our gardens. You will find them mainly underneath objects such as paving slabs or in compost heaps.



### If you see a snake...

- Keep calm!
- Take a good look, but don't touch, catch or trap the snake.
- Try to identify the snake using the pictures and information provided.
- Grass snakes and slow-worms, which are harmless, often visit gardens.
- Adders, which are venomous but normally pose little threat, rarely occur in gardens.
- Smooth snakes are very rare and only a few thousand individuals are left in the wild so it is unlikely that you will see one in your garden.
- It is illegal to kill or injure native snakes.

### Can someone take it away?

The RSPCA will generally help if the snake is injured, and the borough council can assist if the snake is an escaped exotic pet, but if the snake is native (such as a grass snake or adder) it should be left alone.

### Useful contacts

<b>RSPCA</b> <a href="http://www.rspca.org.uk">www.rspca.org.uk</a> <b>Cruelty Line</b> 0870 55 55 999 To report an injured or distressed snake.	<b>FROGLife</b> <a href="http://www.froglife.org">www.froglife.org</a> 01733 558960 Froglife is a national wildlife charity concerned with the protection and conservation of amphibians and reptiles in the UK.
<b>Advice Line</b> 0870 33 35 999 For general advice and assistance.	
<b>English Nature</b> Guide book " <i>Reptiles in your garden: your questions answered</i> " available at: <a href="http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/84056">http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/84056</a>	

July 2015