

# REPTILE

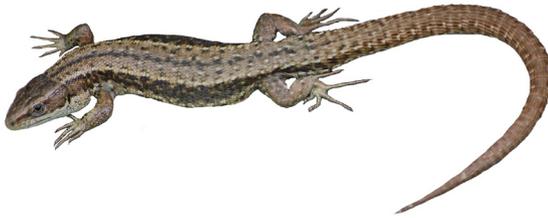
## The viviparous or common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*)

### Adult viviparous or common lizard

Adult viviparous lizards can grow up to 13 to 15 cm in length with distinctive scaly skin. Coloration and markings can be extremely variable from brown, through green, yellow or even blue, with spots or stripes. Lizards have five toes on each foot, and small claws to help them climb.

Lizards are 'cold blooded' or ectothermic, and can sometimes be spotted basking in sunny spots such as on logs, tree stumps or fence posts.

### Male

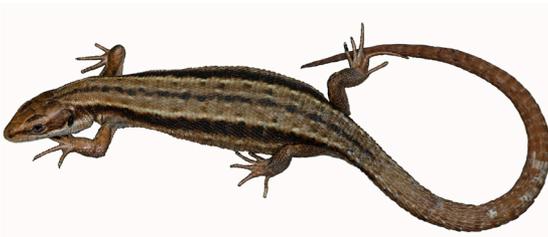


### Male



### Female

### Female



Male lizards often have a flecked pattern on their back. They also show a pronounced thickening at the base of the tail, and a bright speckled underside.

### Juvenile

Young lizards are just a few cm long, and dark brown in colour, but otherwise are perfect miniatures of the adults.

Female lizards typically have striped backs and tend to be more brown in colour than the males.

Females give birth to up to 11 live young in late summer.



Images © Kevin Clarke, John Baker

The only reptile native to Northern Ireland, viviparous lizards can be found in sunny upland and lowland habitats, including heathland, sand dunes, grassland and open woodland. They also adapt well to some human-made habitats such as stone walls, road and railway embankments. You might be lucky to spot one basking on a log, a wooden fence, a big stone or a sunny spot in a hedge bank, but you will have to be very quiet, because they have excellent hearing, and will make off quickly if disturbed. Sometimes you will just see a tail disappearing into the undergrowth. Viviparous lizards are also referred to as common lizards, which is becoming a misnomer as they become increasingly rare following habitat loss and destruction.

Lizards emerge from hibernation in March, and immediately start foraging to build up their reserves after the long winter fast, feeding on a wide variety of invertebrates including grasshoppers, aphids and spiders. The females give birth to live young in late summer, hence the name 'viviparous' lizard. Lizards hibernate through the winter, from October to March, in sheltered frost-free spots, under rubble or stones, or old tree roots and in hedge banks.

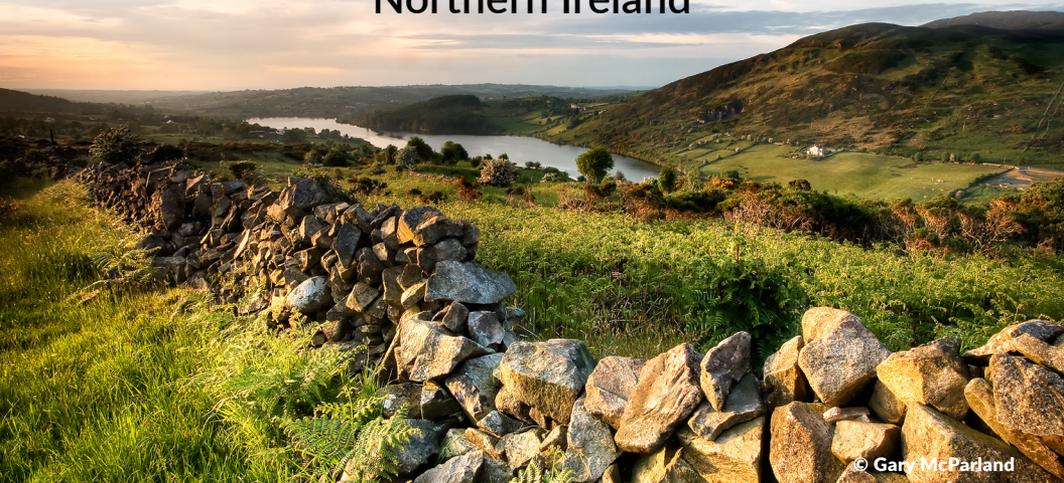


© Kevin Clarke



# DRAGONS IN THE HILLS

The amphibians and reptiles of Northern Ireland



© Gary McParland



# AMPHIBIANS

## The common frog (*Rana temporaria*)

### Adult common frog

Frogs have large and muscular hind legs well-adapted for swimming, and allowing them to jump up to eight times their own body length when on land.

Frogs have webbed toes on their hindfeet.

Common frogs grow to around 6-7cm in body length, and have smooth damp skin.

To catch insects the frog throws its sticky tongue out of its mouth onto its prey and pulls it back in.

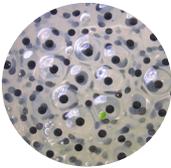
Frogs usually have a distinctive dark 'mask' behind their eyes.

Frogs have movement sensitive eyes situated high on each side of their head enabling them to look out for predators and prey.



Frogs have variable patterns and can be a range of colours, with all shades of brown, olive-green, orange, yellow and red.

### Frog spawn



Each female frog can lay up to 2,000 eggs or 'spawn' in clumps, which can often be seen floating at the waters' surface. Each egg is enclosed in a jelly envelope to protect and insulate it.

### Tadpole



After 3-4 weeks the tadpoles emerge. These are initially black, but as they mature they turn brown with sparkly bronze speckles.

### Froglet



After about 16 weeks the tadpoles develop their hind legs, followed by their front legs, and then lose their tails to metamorphose into tiny froglets.

Images © Brett Lewis Photography and John Baker

The common frog is our most widespread amphibian, and can be found anywhere that there are suitable water bodies for breeding including: ponds, ditches and lakes. In early spring the males can sometimes be heard croaking in their breeding ponds, and you can spot the jelly like spawn clumps from January onwards. Tiny froglets can be seen leaving their ponds at any time from early summer up to September, and both adults and young then forage on land until late autumn. Adults can sometimes be found in gardens, hiding in long grass, leaf litter or even cooling off in a pond, on a hot day. Common frogs eat invertebrates such as beetles, slugs, flies, spiders and earthworms.

As winter approaches, frogs find a sheltered hibernation spot, which can be in a garden, park, allotment or the wider countryside. This is ideally somewhere damp and safe from frost, such as in a compost heap, buried in leaf mulch, under a large log, a pile of wood or a heap of rubble, or even sometimes in ponds.

# The smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*)

Smooth newts are very adaptable, and while their main habitat is countryside wetlands and bogs, they can inhabit almost any water body, and can often be seen in a pond, ditch, or even a big wheel rut. Newts usually stay at the bottom of the pond, breathing through their skin, but you might spot one when it comes up to the surface for a gulp of air. Newts have a varied diet, when on land they feed on caterpillars, worms and slugs, and while in water they eat molluscs, crustaceans and tadpoles.

Smooth newts arrive at their breeding ponds during the spring, from February to March, and may stay right through to July. This is when the males are at their most splendid as they try to attract females with a complicated courtship dance and lots of tail waving. Females can lay from 100 - 600 small greyish white eggs each year, carefully 'gluing' each one into a folded leaf using their back legs to wrap it up to safeguard it from predators. Unlike frog tadpoles, newt larvae develop their front legs before their back legs, breathing underwater through three pairs of feathery gills.

After breeding, newts return to land and can sometimes be found sheltering in long grass, scrub or woodland. Like other amphibians, newts hibernate during the winter under logs, or in other nooks and crannies, emerging in January or February.

## Male

A small newt growing to just 9-10cm in length. Male smooth newts develop a continuous wavy crest along the back and tail during the breeding season. Breeding males also have a silvery tail flash.



Newts have five toes on their hind feet and only four on their front feet. Males develop extra webbing on their hind toes during the breeding season.

## Female

No crest along the back or tail in females or non-breeding males.



Male newts have a deep orange belly with enlarged black spots.

Female newts have a light orange belly with light freckling.



## Eggs



Female newts wrap individual eggs in aquatic vegetation, with distinctive leaf folding. Each female can lay up to 600 eggs over a 6 week period between March and late May.

## Larvae



Terrestrial smooth newts are sometimes mistaken for viviparous lizards. You can distinguish them because newts have smooth skin, whereas lizards have scales. Newts only have four toes on their front feet, whereas lizards have five toes with tiny claws on each foot. Lizards also tend to scuttle away more quickly, if approached.