

Reptiles on the ridge

The Cheshire Sandstone Ridge

The ridge is like a backbone of very old red sandstone which stretches from Frodsham in the north, to Malpas in the south. Tarporley is at the heart of the ridge. Along the ridge there are all sorts of features, such as ancient woodlands, wetlands and mosses. This amazing landscape is rich in history and in wildlife. One of Britain's best walks is to be found here, which is called the 'Sandstone Trail'.

Did you know?

Reptiles are cold-blooded. This means they need the sun to warm them up, then they can move around and find food and friends.



Hi, I'm Chloe... I've been learning about reptiles which live on the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. Reptiles are cold-blooded animals. There are four different species of reptiles living on the ridge. These are slow worms, grass snakes, adders and common lizards. Knowing where they are means that we can look after them and their habitats. Come along and join me!

Welcome to the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge



Reptile mats

When you are walking on the ridge, you might see some reptile mats. Reptiles can't warm themselves up like you and me. They need some help. The mats absorb heat, meaning they are great for cold-blooded reptiles, helping them to get warm and become active. We closely watch the mats to see if there are reptiles hiding underneath, but please don't disturb any mats that you might spot.



Try this trick at home! Old carpet tiles can act in the same way. You never know, you might find that you have slow worms or lizards in your back garden.

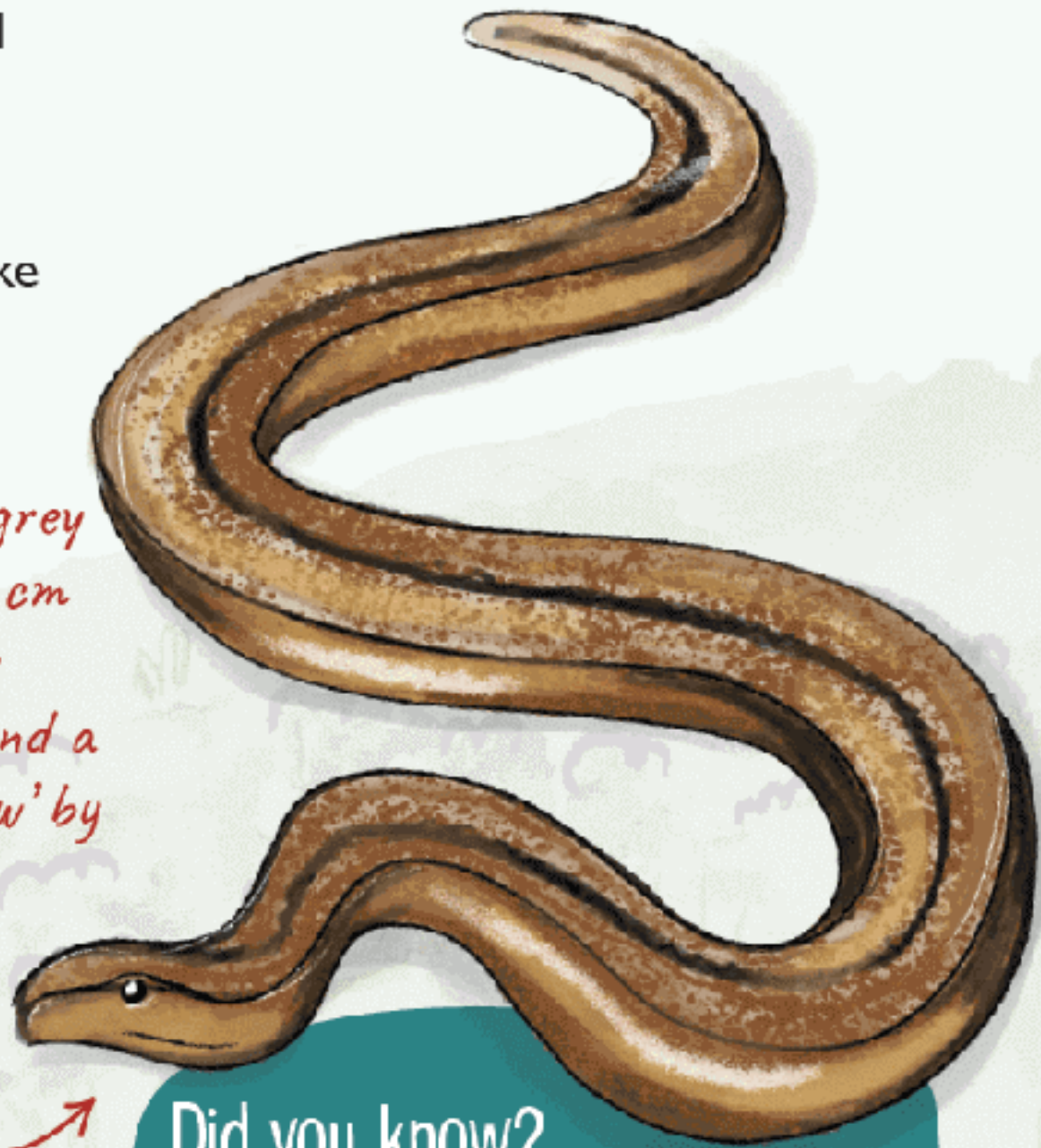


Slow Worm

Although slow worms look like snakes, they are a type of legless lizard. If you are lucky, you might see a slow worm 'basking' or sunning itself, particularly on the heathland and grassy areas of the ridge.

They are shy creatures and move slowly. They feed on minibeasts, like snails, slugs, ants and spiders.

Slow worms are smaller than snakes and have smooth, golden-grey skin. They can grow up to 40-50 cm long. Females are larger than the males and they have dark sides and a dark stripe down their back. 'Slow' by name but actually quite 'fast'! If they are frightened they can bite, poo and even shed their tail to escape being caught.



Did you know?

Slow worms are 'viviparous' – that's a tricky word! It means their eggs hatch whilst they are still in the female's body. She then gives birth to live 'hatchlings'.

How long can I live?

Circle the correct age below.

- 0 - 10
Years
- 11 - 20
Years
- 21 - 30
Years

Answer: 21 - 30 years.



Reptiles can easily be disturbed by your dog, please help us to help them by keeping your dog on the path or a lead.

Common Lizard

You will have to be very quiet to spot a common lizard on the ridge, but they are widespread. They are easily scared and will soon scuttle off to safety. They are pretty quick which helps them to catch spiders, flies, grasshoppers, snails, worms and centipedes.

Did you know?
Common lizards are also 'viviparous' – just like slow worms.

A good reason for their speediness is that many animals like to eat them. However, if you remain still, they will soon return to their favourite basking spot in the sun.

The common lizard can be around 10-15 cm in length. Their skin is covered in tiny scales, which form patterns of spots and stripes. This helps them to camouflage (blend in) with their surroundings. Most common lizards are grey, brown or bronze but some can be olive green too!



Reptile refuge

All our reptiles 'hibernate', passing through winter in a resting state. To help them, we have been building a number of 'refuges' which are resting places along the ridge. These are sometimes called 'hibernacula'. During the winter months these airy, earth, log and sandstone structures help keep our reptiles warm and safe.

They are also useful hiding places for 'amphibians' too. Amphibians are also cold-blooded animals, BUT they are happy to live in water or on land.



Adder

The adder is the only poisonous snake in the UK. On the ridge they are very rare, but over the next few years, efforts are being made to increase their numbers.

Adders are well camouflaged, which helps them to hide. They can be spotted basking in the sunshine in the woodland glades and heathland on the ridge. The adder is a greyish snake, with a dark zigzag pattern down its back and they have red eyes. They can grow up to 80 cm in length.



They inject their poison (known as venom) into their prey when they bite. It can kill a vole or a mouse, which normally crawls away and dies. The adder then swallows its prey whole.

True or false?

Adders hibernate from October.

True

False

Answer: True

Did you know?

Adders won't bite you unless they are scared. It is rare, and the bite can be sore and make you poorly. It's always best to see a doctor if you think you have been bitten by an adder.

Adder word search

H	J	V	E	N	O	M	O	U	S	R	Y	O
M	S	P	R	E	Y	G	L	B	G	S	A	L
V	N	E	M	K	A	I	X	V	M	A	D	I
C	A	M	O	U	F	L	A	G	E	W	D	G
N	K	S	U	N	S	H	I	N	E	K	E	D
F	E	H	S	Z	I	G	Z	A	G	D	R	I
M	T	L	E	K	P	O	L	U	S	H	Y	A

Venomous

Zigzag

Sunshine

Camouflage

Mouse

Shy

Adder

Snake

Prey



Grass Snake

The grass snake is our longest and most common snake and can be 1.5 m in length! Grass snakes are brilliant swimmers and will take to the water to find their favourite food such as frogs and toads. There are plenty of damp and boggy places on the ridge where you can spot these fantastic creatures, as well as in grasslands and woodlands.

Even if you're not lucky enough to see one, you might find their skin near a pond edge. They shed their skins at least once a year. The discarded skin, which is usually in one piece, is called a 'slough'.



Stealthy slitherers. Grass snakes are lethal hunters of frogs, toads and other small creatures, but they will rush for cover at the first sound of humans approaching.

Colour in!



Did you know?

Grass snakes are not venomous. They can defend themselves by giving off a horrible smell. They do this to stop predators from eating them!

Reptile and amphibian collective nouns

A collective noun is a word that refers to a group of things, like animals. Can you decide which is the correct collective noun for our reptiles and amphibians?

A. Frogs

B. Lizards

C. Snakes

D. Toads

E. Newts



1. Leap

1. Lounge

1. Slither

1. Clump

1. Armada

2. Army

2. Collection

2. Den

2. Assembly

2. Crowd

3. Croak

3. Huddle

3. Swarm

3. Knot

3. Larder

Answer: A.2.B.1.C.2.D.3.E.1.

Did you know?

Reptiles need to find places where they can shelter, hibernate and bask.

Did you know?

Amphibians can live on land and in water.

A word to show off to your teachers...

Hibernation

Hibernation is a Latin word meaning wintry or winter quarters. In hibernation, animals curl up in a safe place and stay there until winter ends. This is how some animals deal with the harshness of winter.

Would you like to hibernate?

Yes!

No!



What else can you find under the reptile mats?

Sometimes we spot amphibians hiding under the mats because they are also cold-blooded. They can live in water and on land. We often see creepy-crawlies too, such as ants and centipedes. Occasionally we spot mice and voles. Please remember not to lift any mats.

Common frog

They are usually olive green or brown, which helps keep them camouflaged. If they are disturbed, their long legs help them to jump away quickly.



I love jumping to catch flies, bees and other insects which live in and around the pond.



Common toad

Toads have shorter legs than frogs so cannot leap very far. When disturbed they can inflate their body and, if handled, ooze water onto your hand. We try not to disturb them.



My olive-brown, warty skin is not pleasant to the taste and is a useful form of defence. Look out for my dazzling copper-coloured eyes.



Smooth newt

Although there are three species of newt on the Sandstone Ridge, the smooth newt is the most common.



Watch out for male smooth newts. Look at their bright, orange belly and beautiful crest during the breeding season.



*Take a look at our website!
www.sandstoneridge.org.uk*



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