



Image courtesy of Jez Wickens

FACT FILE

Length:
10-16 cm

Weight:
5g

Colour:
Ranging from grey, to brown to green. It has a black line down its back and its body is speckled with black spots.

Diet:
Insects, spiders, snails and worms.

Habitat:
Grasslands, edges of woodlands, boglands, gardens and sand dunes.

Distribution:
Found throughout Ireland and across Northern Europe to Central Asia.

COMMON LIZARD

English Name: Common Lizard or Viviparous Lizard or Eurasian Lizard

Scientific Name: *Zootoca vivipara* **Irish Name:** Earc luachra

The Common Lizard is Ireland's only native reptile. It has a long, slim body, covered in small scales, and four short legs, with five toes on each foot. Its body tapers to a long tail, which it can detach from its own body to distract predators while making its escape.

Another reptile, the slow worm, can also be found in Ireland. This reptile differs from the Common Lizard in that it is legless and is confined to County Clare, where it is thought to have been introduced.

During the winter, the Common Lizard hibernates underground. As the weather warms up in the spring it emerges and become more active, particularly in April.

All in a Name

The Common Lizard is also known as the Viviparous Lizard. "Viviparous" means "to bear live young". The pregnant female develops her egg membranes inside her body. When they are fully grown, they break free from the membrane and are born as free-living reptiles. The Common Lizard can have from 3-11 young, usually around July. Once the young are born, the mother leaves them to care for themselves.

The lizard will often sun itself along paths and ditches. It can, however, be hard to see as its colouring camouflages it well and it can move very, very quickly if startled.

The main threat to the lizard is the loss of its habitat, as well as becoming a tasty meal for such animals as large birds, foxes and cats.

The Common Lizard is not considered to be endangered in Ireland, though scientists are always keen to hear about sightings. One such survey can be found at www.biology.ie

In Ireland, the Common Lizard can sometimes be confused with the Smooth Newt, which is an amphibian, but looks similar to the Common Lizard in some respects.

There are approximately 6,000 species of lizard around the world. The largest species is about 3 m in length, though most are fairly small.



Detaching its Tail

To distract a predator, a lizard can detach its tail, giving the lizard time to escape. Over time, the lizard can re-grow the tail but it will be much smaller, and slightly different in colour.



The Hot Sun to Warm the Body

The Common Lizard loves to bask in the sunshine. Being a reptile, it is a cold-blooded animal, which means it needs to absorb heat from its surroundings and from the sun in order to raise its body temperature enough to be able to move quickly. It is usually active during the morning and the afternoon, taking advantage of the sun's heat. The middle of the day can be too hot and cause overheating. In that case, it moves into the shade.

