

## The Slow Worm

**The legless lizard of Europe is a secretive creature that is often overlooked.**

*By Mark O'Shea*

Distribution: British Isles to southwest Asia and northwest Africa.

Habitat: Heathland, woodland, gardens, railway and motorway embankments.

Diet: Earthworms and slugs.

Max. length: 150-200mm SVL (400-500mm TL).

Reproductive strategy: Viviparous with litters of 6-12 neonates.

The legless lizard of Europe is a secretive creature that is often overlooked. Juveniles resemble little golden arrows with dark bellies and a black stripe down the golden back. Old males may have blue spots. This is the longest lived lizard known with an age in excess of 50 years. The best place to find slow worms is under pieces of corrugated sheeting. The scientific name is *Anguis*, meaning "snake," a confusion based on their leglessness, and *fragilis*, a reference to their ability to practice "voluntary caudal autotomy," they break off their tails in defense.

Sources for more information:

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