

Wall Lizards

Podarcis muralis



What Are They?

Wall lizards are aptly named. Their natural habitat is rocky terrain which means that they are also happy running straight up and along masonry walls. They are attracted to old buildings with plenty of nooks and crannies to hide in. They should not really be in the UK, but having got here in the nineteenth century by escaping or being introduced into the wild, they seem to be intent on staying. They can now be found at many sites especially along the south coast from Eastbourne to Bournemouth.

So how can you tell if you have a Wall lizard or a Common lizard, *Zootoca vivipara*?

Telling Them Apart

The wall lizard is a similar size to the largest common lizards growing to 20cms, though two thirds of this length is tail. By contrast the common lizard tail is only half the body length. Common lizards generally are rather shorter at 15cms.

The wall lizard may be predominantly brown, the French style, or a rather flashy green, Italian style. The body is mottled along the flanks and the belly is mottled black and white with some blue. The eyes are set relatively high and the snout is rounded.



By contrast the common lizard is usually darker brown with complex patterns of lines running right along the body. There is some variation from black (melanistic) through to dark brown, grey, green or even red.

The wall lizards are much more agile leaping up vertical surfaces and in and out of crannies. They really enjoy sunbathing even in winter and the female lays her eggs under loose stones, often several times per year.



Send Us Your Sightings

Any reptile sighting, please send date, time place and photo, if possible, to iRecord or www.sussexarg.org.uk

Wall Lizard, Paul Stevens



By contrast common lizards are more ponderous and are viviparous - the female carries her eggs within her body until they are ready to hatch.

In Sussex wall lizards can be found on cliffs at Eastbourne, the old fort at Shoreham Beach and at Worthing railway station. In this country wall lizards are generally found on old crumbling walls, where there is sufficient vegetation to attract their invertebrate prey, but also plenty of open space suitable for their basking needs.

Female wall lizards can discriminate between males with dissimilar levels of testosterone based on the scent alone, as females tongue-flick at higher rates towards the scent of secretions of males with high levels of testosterone. Males with high levels of testosterone also produce larger amounts of secretion.

Common Lizard Paul Stevens



Wall Lizard actual length, two thirds tail

Common Lizard actual length, half tail

Are there any other Lizards in the UK?

The sand lizard is a rare, but beautiful animal. It is rare because it needs a warm climate and soft sandy soil in which to burrow to lay eggs. These conditions are only found on a few heaths in southern England and dunes in the north-west. You will not find sand lizards in other habitats.



The Slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) is our commonest lizard. It can be found in any habitat which is sunny and has sufficient ground cover. It is found in many gardens especially around compost heaps.

It is also our strangest lizard as it has decided to do without legs! As a result they are often mistaken for snakes. They can be distinguished from snakes by their eyelids, which snakes do not have and a notched rather than a forked tongue.



