

BBC
breathing
places



pocket guide

BBC Breathing Places is a major BBC Learning campaign to inspire and motivate you to create and care for nature-friendly green spaces where you live.

Getting out and enjoying nature can have great benefits for you and there are lots of exciting ways you can get involved.

Go wild with Breathing Places at:
bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces

“All living things have the potential to totally blow my mind. It just depends on how we look at them and what we are lucky enough to see.”

Nick Baker
BBC's *Really Wild* presenter

Going primeval

It might sound crazy but there are prehistoric creatures in your local patch – creatures whose ancestors have walked, crawled and slithered since the age of the dinosaurs. And they're still doing the same around the UK today.

Amphibians and reptiles are spread throughout the world, with thousands of species grouped into a few different shapes.

Amphibians:

- Caecilians (strange, worm-like burrowers)
- Frogs and toads
- Salamanders and newts

Reptiles:

- Crocodiles and alligators
- Turtles and tortoises
- Snakes
- Lizards

In the UK we have seven types of amphibians and six types of reptiles.

Cold blood is disappearing

Amphibians and reptiles are cold-blooded creatures. This means their body temperatures are controlled by the temperature of their surroundings, which explains why you'll often find them stretched out, basking on rocks, soaking up the sun.

They also rarely stray from the places they love. The problem is that nowadays the places they love, live, feed and breed in are rapidly being destroyed by human activity.

In fact, for amphibians, the situation is really serious. Of six thousand species worldwide, three thousand are thought to be disappearing.

The good news is that in the UK there's plenty you can do to keep them around for another few million years. So what are you waiting for?



Getting frog-friendly

Whether you're digging a pond, making a reptile rockery or doing some frog-watching with the family, engaging with amphibians and reptiles is fascinating and fun.

Plus you don't have to go far. The best thing about amphibians in particular is that some species are widespread. Probably within five minutes' walk of where you are now, there are frogs and newts getting on with their daily business of gobbling food and moving from pond to pond.

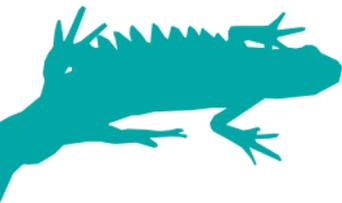
Successfully attracting reptiles into your garden can be a bit more tricky, since it depends largely on whether there are any populations locally. However, it's still worth trying – at the very least, you'll attract lots of other wildlife into your garden and that's got to be good for nature!

There's no place like home

If you're looking for inspiration on how to attract amphibians and reptiles into your garden or local patch, here are a few simple ideas to get you started:

Dig a pond – Amphibians need ponds to breed, so if you want to attract frogs, toads and newts, why not put in a pond? Oh, and you'll also be doing a favour for lots of other local wildlife that rely on water – dragonflies, watersnails, bats, foxes, robins and blackbirds to name but a few...

Create a toad abode – Lay a smallish, clay flowerpot on its side, bury it up to the halfway mark and fill it with dead leaves. Now all you have to do is wait and see if you attract a toad lodger. Don't worry if it takes a while.



Build a reptile rockery – Reptiles like places to bask and absorb the sun's rays so a good south-facing rockery, with lots of places they can hide (mainly from cats), is a real winner.

Snake-friendly compost heaps – Female grass snakes often visit gardens looking for places to lay their eggs. Compost heaps are perfect since the constant decay generates heat, which helps incubate the snake's developing eggs. Nice, traditional heaps of vegetation are best.

Log piles – If you want a really successful wildlife garden, then these are essential. Along with compost heaps, log piles provide a great way to attract slow worms which love to bury themselves in the places where favourite snacks like ants, slugs and woodlice congregate.

Remember, if you haven't got your own garden, you can take part in events run by organisations (see pages 8–9 for ideas).

**Amphibian
and reptile**

bingo



Next time you're out and about, see how many of these you can identify. You may not find them all as some are rarer than others.



Common frog – Female frogs lay around 2,000 eggs (frogspawn) in water. Less than three in every thousand survive to become a mature adult!

Seen



Common lizard – This fast-moving chap is particularly at home on sunny banks with lots of hiding places. Go early in the morning to get a good look.

Seen



Common toad – To avoid predators like grass snakes, toads blow themselves up like balloons in order to make predators think they're too big to swallow.



Seen



Grass snake – Often seen marauding ponds and rivers in late spring and summer looking for amphibian prey. Can reach up to 5ft long!



Seen



Great crested newt – Biggest and rarest newt in the UK, reaching around 15cm. Identifiable by its dark, warty skin and its jagged, dragon-like crest.



Seen



Slow worm – Has a thin, bullet-shaped head and smooth, shiny scales. Often mistaken for a snake but is, in fact, a legless lizard.



Bingo!

Do One Thing

Try some of these ideas if you want to get even closer to amphibians and reptiles:

Frogwatch

Take part in a survey and your sightings of amphibians and reptiles could really make a difference. Local councils and organisations like Froglife and the Herpetological Conservation Trust are a good place to start.

Reptile-watching

Your local nature ranger or reserve can point out the reptile hot spots in your local area. Once you know where they are, take a notebook to jot down your sightings, draw pictures and note the times and dates you spot them.

Discover some pond life

Pond dipping is a great way to introduce yourself to amphibians. Local nature reserves and organisations like the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) and The Wildlife Trusts often run events.

Watch frogspawn grow

Visit your local pond in early spring and you could witness a frenzy of activity as frogs and toads get ready to lay their spawn. Keep visiting and you'll see the spawn appear and develop from eggs to tadpoles.

Clean a pond

It's a messy job, but most ponds need a bit of cleaning out and the results are immensely satisfying. Opportunities exist all over the UK – ask your local nature reserve or contact the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) to get you started.

Volunteer

Spread right across the UK is a network of volunteers who do a great deal locally for conservation. Check out Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK (ARG UK) to find your nearest branch.

For more details regarding these and other ideas, check out: bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces



do
one
thing

For more ideas of what you can
do for nature, why not check out
other Do One Thing activities at:

bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces

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