

## A DECLINE IN NUMBERS

In 1682, the distinguished scholar, Poingdestre, observed that the green lizard could be found frequently in every hedge and described them as 'a grace and ornament to the Island'. Poingdestre's observations cannot now be verified but certainly by 1907 a major decline in green lizard numbers had taken place. This has been blamed largely on the growing size and sprawl of St. Helier and a profitable market in green lizards to the pet trade.

Modern development has added to the decline in green lizard numbers. The loss, isolation and fragmentation of sites through development and agricultural practices are thought to be contributory factors and the deterioration of sites through pollution, drainage, furze fires and unrestricted access to lizard habitat are also serious considerations.

## THE GOOD NEWS

However, much is being accomplished in order to protect the green lizard and the ecologically sensitive areas in which it lives. Three of Jersey's fragile habitats are now designated Sites of Special Interest (SSI) and others are awaiting SSI designation. Public interest, careful management and the introduction of the Conservation of Wildlife (Jersey) Law 2000 by the Environment Department are giving all Island wildlife, including the green lizard, vital protection and hopefully, a secure future.

*It is inevitable that some gardens bordering suitable habitat will become hosts to these beautiful animals. The information in this brochure describes their needs and a little care when gardening will encourage their continued presence. Remember too that they are a protected species and before making major changes that could cause lizards unnecessary disturbance, seek advice. In order to remain within the law, contact the Environment Department on 866200.*

*The Department would also welcome reports of green lizards sighted on the north and north-east coasts of the Island. The above telephone number can be used or e-mail Nina Hall – [n.hall@gov.je](mailto:n.hall@gov.je)*

## Jersey Country Code

- Guard against all risk of fire.
- Keep to footpaths, particularly on cliffs.
- Keep dogs under control and remove waste.
- Take your litter home. Plastic and glass is dangerous to wildlife.
- Do not pick wild plants. Leave them so others can enjoy them.
- Do not disturb bird nests or remove eggs.
- Trees take years to grow, do not damage them by climbing those too small to take your weight or by breaking off branches.
- Keep all ponds, streams and reservoirs clear of pollution.
- Respect the peace and quiet of the natural habitats and avoid disturbing others.
- Shut all gates.
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone.
- Take special care on country roads.
- Do not ride bicycles on footpaths.
- Take great care when walking along the foreshore at low water. Always check tide tables prior to exploration.
- After searching under rocks, replace them as you found them.
- Wear appropriate boots and clothing.
- Above all, enjoy Jersey's unique environment and try to learn more about the many different habitats and species.

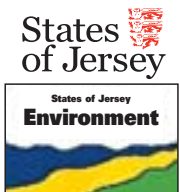
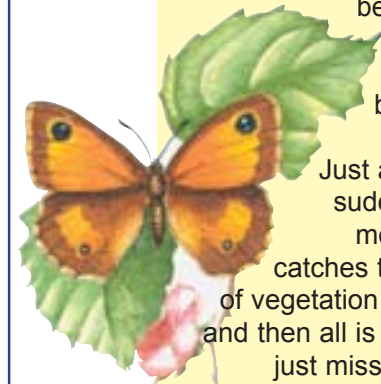


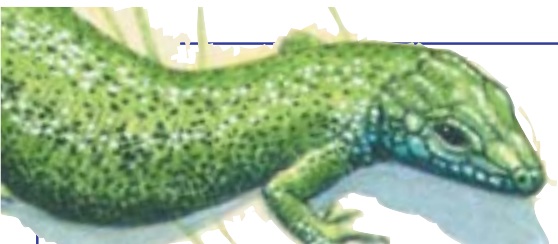
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## ABOUT GREEN LIZARDS

On Jersey's west coast the sandy track leading through the dunes is edged on either side by thick, spiky marram grass. The habitat, bathed in warm sunlight, is rich in animal species; bloody-nosed beetles, blue-winged grasshoppers, there may even be a skylark on the wing, high above. Just ahead, there is the sudden sound of rapid movement. The eye catches the slightest quiver of vegetation deep in the shade and then all is still. You probably just missed seeing Britain's largest and most spectacular lizard, *Lacerta bilineata*, the green lizard.





## NATURAL HISTORY

Jersey is the only area in Britain where green lizards occur naturally, in fact a number of attempts to introduce the species to mainland Britain have proved unsuccessful. The species is among the largest in Europe with adult males reaching lengths of between 30 and 40 cm (16 in.) with body weights of up to 45g. recorded. Recent studies show that Jersey's green lizard *Lacerta bilineata* is found exclusively in Western Europe and is a sub-species of *Lacerta viridis*, a European green lizard with a range extending much further east.

There are colour variations within the species, designed, perhaps, to blend with the surrounding vegetation, though the predominant colour is green. Adult males are distinguished from the females by a larger head and a blue throat, the latter becoming much more prominent during the breeding season. The throat of the female is yellowish green.

The breeding season takes place in April and May and at this time fierce fighting among males is not uncommon as they establish territories. Between five and twenty eggs are produced in June or July. The clutch is then hidden beneath vegetation or soil and warmed by the sun. The young emerge in September.

### Green Lizard Fact File 1

The domestic cat is high in the list of animals that prey upon green lizards. Birds of prey will take them too, Kestrels in particular. The remains of lizards are frequently found at plucking stations.



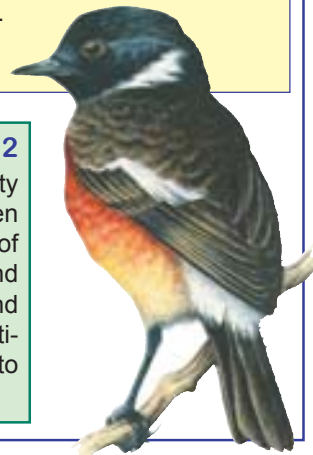
## BASKING

**GREEN LIZARDS** are ectothermic heliotherms, that is to say they are cold blooded. Unlike mammals, they have no in-built control over their body temperature so they find warmth in suitable weather by basking. This essential heat is gathered either from direct sunlight or, on sunless days, from warm air or the residual heat from rocks.

Jersey represents the north-western edge of the green lizard's range and because temperatures are generally lower than those experienced by other European species, the Island's population needs to spend much longer basking. Foraging for food and mating will generally cause their body temperature to fall and such activities need to be fitted in with essential basking periods.

### Green Lizard Fact File 2

Green lizards enjoy a variety of insect food and will often climb among the branches of small flowering shrubs and plants to hunt for bees and butterflies, using their beautifully camouflaged bodies to good effect.



## HABITAT

Research has shown that green lizards are found mostly in dune systems, on cliff slopes and on coastal heaths. But even here they choose their habitat carefully. The vegetation needs to provide cover from predators but with open areas for basking. There should be plant growth to attract their main source of food, bees, butterflies and other insects and a layer of sandy soil in which the female can deposit her eggs. Add to these the need for warm safe areas in which to hibernate during the cold months and it becomes clear that green lizard habitat is very specific indeed.

Many of the more densely populated green lizard habitats are cut by public foot paths and on those tracks used regularly by walkers they appear to be more people-tolerant. A quiet approach, taking care not to cast a shadow over the basking lizard, will often provide excellent photographic opportunities.

The largest populations of green lizards are found in the west and south-west of Jersey. Les Blanchés Banques, the dune system at the southern end of St Ouen's Bay and L'Ouaisné Common are considered the largest strongholds.

There are also small coastal populations in other areas of the Island where suitable conditions exist though the gradual spread of bracken in many areas of the Island is contributing to habitat loss.

### Green Lizard Fact File 3

Furze fires are totally destructive. They kill wildlife and destroy habitat that takes years to rejuvenate. Not just lizards die in fires but their eggs, food source and cover. Take care when lighting fires or discarding cigarettes.

