



**amphibian and reptile
conservation**



ARG UK

LOOKING FOR SLOW-WORMS AND OTHER REPTILES OR AMPHIBIANS

Churchyards, chapel yards and cemeteries can be great places for both reptiles, such as snakes and lizards, and amphibians such as frogs, toads and newts. You may see lizards basking in the sun on walls or monuments or perhaps a frog or toad hunting in a cool, damp corner or rotting wood pile.

To find out more about how to recognise amphibian and reptile species take a look at these guides produced by ARG-UK and ARC*: [ARC/ARG-UK amphibian identification guide](#), [ARC/ARG-UK reptile identification guide](#).

Slow-worms are frequently present in burial grounds but rarely seen as they may be hidden under flat stones, at the base of walls or in long, tussocky grass. All reptiles need to warm up in order to be active and will bask, flattening themselves in a warm, sunny place so as to maximise heat transfer. Cold mornings or overcast and chilly weather will see them seeking warmth prior to hunting for food. Slow-worms are harder to spot than other reptiles as they don't bask in the open sunshine but stay undercover. Something that warms up that they can hide under is ideal, this is where reptile mats come in. A reptile mat is a piece of material or metal that will warm up quickly, making an ideal hiding place.

A reptile mat is usually roughly 50cm square; roofing material such as corrugated metal or onduline is perfect, with onduline easier to handle as it is quite light and doesn't have sharp edges. It's often possible to get offcuts from building supplies or roofing contractors and people making and selling sheds.

The mat needs to be placed close to vegetation cover but in a sunny area. It can then be left *in situ* for a few weeks to allow animals to find it. Depending on the size of the burial ground and the amount of cover available you may wish to put down quite a few mats to increase the chance of detecting these fascinating animals. NB If you are not the burial ground manager, do please seek permission first.

It's important to leave the mat undisturbed for a few weeks and then to keep disturbance to a minimum as if the mat is repeatedly turned over the animals may learn not to use it. You can reduce the possibility of disturbance by placing mats away from paths. It's a good idea to have more than one person ready when you do turn the mat as slow-worms and other animals may move very fast! Perhaps one person to turn the mat and the other to take a speedy photograph? You can send the photographs directly into [iNaturalist](#) which not only helps to identify what you are seeing but also records your observation so the data can be used to

improve our understanding of where these animals are found and inform their conservation. We would love it if you join our [burial ground project](#) within the system. If smartphones are not for you, you can use a pen and paper to let us know the four Ws, what you saw, where you saw it, when (the date) and who (your name) and send it to enquires@cfga.org.uk.

Even if you do not find any reptiles or amphibians under your reptile mat, there's a good chance there will be something of interest to look at, perhaps spiders, woodlice or earthworms. N.B. It's best to photograph rather than pick up any animals that you find, it is stressful for them to be handled and slow-worms may drop their tails in response.

To learn more about slow-worms as well as all other UK reptiles and amphibians, take a further look at the websites of [ARC](#) and [ARG-UK](#). A series of training events including Beginner and Improver level courses and fun quizzes can be found at [Training courses | ARC](#) and there is a range of family activities available at [Education | ARC](#).

* ARG-UK is Amphibian & Reptile Groups UK, ARC is Amphibian and Reptile Conservation



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