

# Cowgate Cemetery June 2024

Deborah Gasking

The following have recently been identified at Cowgate Cemetery: -

## Common Lizard

A common lizard was seen basking in the warm sun atop a cut grass mound.

These are protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. They are a Priority Species under the UK Post - 2010 Biodiversity Framework.

Living up to its name, the common lizard is the UK's most common and widespread reptile; it is the only reptile native to Ireland. It is found across many habitats, including heathland, moorland, woodland and grassland, where it can be seen basking in sunny spots.

Also known as the 'viviparous lizard', the common lizard is unusual among reptiles as it incubates its eggs inside its body and 'gives birth' to live young rather than laying eggs. Adults emerge from hibernation in spring, mating in April and May, and producing three to eleven young in July.

## How to identify

The common lizard is variable in colour, but



*Common Lizard*

is usually brownish-grey, often with rows of darker spots or stripes down the back and sides. Males have bright yellow or orange undersides with spots, while females have paler, plain bellies.

## Did you know?

If threatened by a predator, the common lizard will shed its still-moving tail in order to distract its attacker and make a quick getaway. This leaves a scar behind, but it can regrow its tail, although it is usually shorter than the original.

## Slow Worm

Spotted moving in the undergrowth. Neither slow nor a worm, and despite appearances, the slow worm is actually a legless lizard. Generally found basking in the sun on grasslands and in compost heaps in gardens.

These are also protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Priority Species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework.

It has the ability to shed its tail and blink with its eyelids.

Slow worms can be found in heathland, tussocky grassland and woodland edges where they can find invertebrates to eat and a sunny patch in which to sunbathe. They are often found in mature gardens and allotments, where they like hunting around the compost heap. However, if you have a cat, you are unlikely to find them in your garden as cats predate them. Like other reptiles, slow worms spend the winter in a dormant, hibernation-like state known as brumation, usually from October to March.



*Slow Worm*

### **How to identify**

The slow worm is much smaller than a snake and has smooth, golden-grey skin. Males are paler in colour and sometimes sport blue spots, while females are larger, with dark sides and a dark stripe down the back.

### **Did you know?**

The mating season for slow worms kicks off in May and males become aggressive towards each other. During courtship, the male takes hold of the female by biting her head or neck, and they intertwine their bodies. Courtship may last for as long as 10 hours! Females incubate the eggs internally, 'giving birth' to an average of eight young in summer.

### **Kentish Snail**

*Monacha cantiana*, or the Kentish Snail, is usually found in herbal layers of hedges, waste ground, shrublands, at roadsides and railways, also in dunes, but not in woods, preferring well-drained calcareous soils (chalk, limestone).

Juveniles are often attached high up on the vegetation for long periods. Sixty-ninety eggs are laid between June and September. Juveniles hatch after two weeks and reach maturity after one year.

Introduced to Great Britain with farmers in



*Kentish Snail*

late Roman times and spread mainly in the mediaeval period, occupying a compact area covering South and East England, and still continues spreading (isolated sites in Wales, West and Central England and Scotland).

### **Common Spotted Orchid**

This is the easiest of all our orchids to see: Sometimes, so many flowers appear together that they create a pale pink carpet in woodlands, old quarries, dunes and marshes.

In Cowgate, the spread is less than previous years; we think this is due to our reduced number of volunteers. But this is set to be corrected with the enthusiastic help of Jason from the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership and his volunteers.

It is in bloom between June and August.

### **How to identify**

The common spotted orchid gets its name from its leaves, which are green with many purple, oval spots. They form a rosette at ground level before the flower spike appears; narrower leaves sheath the stem. The flowers range from white and pale pink, through to purple, but have distinctive darker pink spots and stripes on their three-lobed lips. The flowers are densely packed in short, cone-shaped clusters.