

# The VIVIPAROUS LIZARD

by W. G. RUFFLE

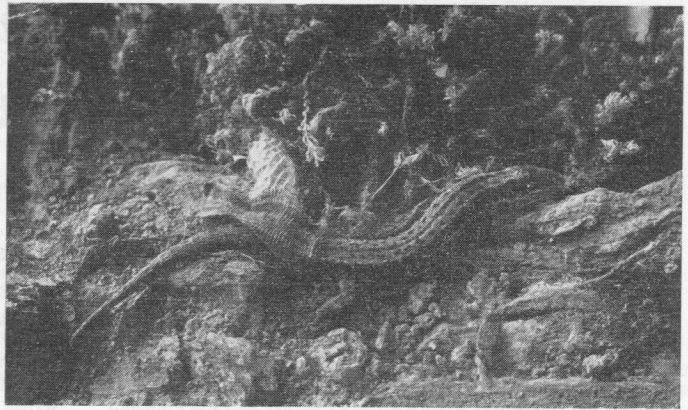


Photo:

Walter Murray

This lizard has been caught in the act of sloughing its old skin

ENGLAND is a disappointing country from the herpetologist's point of view. Our six native varieties of reptile and eight of amphibia compare very poorly with their foreign counterparts, so many of which are larger, more gaily-coloured and exhibit a greater diversity of habits. Yet, it is felt our own species have a charm and attraction of their own, so often forgotten when their foreign cousins are available, but all the more readily appreciated when imports from abroad are negligible.

The present writer has made a special study of the viviparous lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*) which abounds on heaths and sandbanks over a wide area in Southern England, and also exists throughout Great Britain. It is not very easy to spot one of these lizards, whose habit it is to lie half-hidden in the grass, basking in the sun with body flattened out to ensure that the widest possible area is exposed to the sun's rays.

The viviparous lizard awakens quite early in the year. The males are the first to be roused by the growing power of the sun, and may be seen on sunny days from about mid-February. The females emerge about three weeks later. The sexes may be most easily distinguished by the coloration of the underparts. Those of the male are orange or red with black spots, while the female is pale yellow underneath, the spots being scanty or absent. Courtship takes place in May. The male approaches the lady cautiously, then suddenly grabs her very firmly in the middle of the body. Sometimes she will resist, but if she is acquiescent the male swings his body round that of his mate until their cloacae meet, and fertilisation takes place. After mating is over the males are less often to be seen basking—probably they are more active after food; but the females on the other hand bask the more owing to the necessity of stimulating the development of the young.

Baby lizards appear in July or August. The female repairs to some spot that is sheltered from the rude interruptions of man or other large animals, and deposits the flimsy, shell-less "eggs" from which the already fully-developed baby lizards escape. They are almost immediately able to fend for themselves, and establish little homes near tree-tops or under piles of leaves from which they emerge to hunt food. It is probable that a number of specimens fail to get sufficient food for the hibernation period, and thus waste away by the spring. In any case the youngsters have a busy time from July until October, finding tiny flies, spiders, larvae, etc., on which to feed, ready for the winter.

Hibernation for the adults usually commences in mid-October. The lizards then choose a spot well beneath the surface, usually under tree roots and there await the coming

winter. It is a long time before they really settle down, the males in particular being liable to appear on mild days as late as 20th November. Similarly any unusual burst of sunshine may bring a few males forth in mid-January. The youngsters are later than the adults in commencing to hibernate but strangely enough, are also later to appear in the following spring.

In captivity the viviparous lizard needs a little care. A little dampness is essential, and the sun should not be allowed to shine into the vivarium through two layers of glass, although of course some basking facilities are essential. The creature's favourite foods are spiders, crane-flies, small grasshoppers and smooth caterpillars or grubs including mealworms. New-born youngsters need tiny fruit-flies or baby spiders. The species does not survive the winter well, and is best liberated, or hibernated in a frost-proof box. If however, a food supply is certain, then the lizards can be kept awake at a temperature of not less than 60°F., but in some individual cases the feeding instinct seems to be impaired in winter whatever the temperature. Individual specimens will feed by hand, and can become extremely tame.

## September Pond

FISHES in ponds will require special attention during the next few weeks. Any live foods in or around the pool will commence to die off as summer draws out, and in order to prepare the fishes for the winter period, during which they will not feed, it is necessary to give some nourishing and fat-store forming foods.

Cooked porridge is useful and is greedily eaten by goldfishes. Brown bread crumb or crushed biscuit may also be given. As always, take care not to give more of these foods than the fishes can clear up in a short time. Uneaten food will not improve conditions in the wintering pond.

It is not advisable to leave fishes out in ponds that are no deeper than two feet. These afford no protection during icy weather. At least three feet depth is preferable. Common goldfishes, comets and shubunkins may stay in the pool but other fancy varieties should be moved to an indoor aquarium now. Remove all leaves that fall into the pond to prevent an undue amount of vegetable decomposition souring the water.

J. F.