

No lounge for local lizards as living room vanishes

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A new ecological network is urgently needed in Northern Ireland to ensure the continued survival of its precious lizard population, according to researchers at Queen's University Belfast.

Lizards are found in coastal areas, heath and boglands around Northern Ireland, but a Queen's study, published in international journal *Amphibia-Reptilia*, has found their natural habitats may have been replaced through agricultural intensification.

"The fact that Northern Ireland has a lizard population will be news to many people. But most people are surprised and delighted when they spot them," according to Dr Neil Reid, Manager of Quercus, Queen's centre for biodiversity and [conservation science](#).

"Unless we act quickly to establish a new ecological network that will preserve the connectivity of remaining heath and boglands, these reptiles could disappear from our landscape altogether."

Often associated with hotter countries, lizards in Northern Ireland can be seen in upland places such as the Sperrins, the Mourne Mountains, Antrim Plateau, Slieve Beagh (Fivemiletown) and West Fermanagh, and in lowland sites such as Peatlands Park in County Armagh. They can also be seen in coastal habitats such as sand dunes at Murlough National Nature Reserve in County Down or the Magilligan-Umbra-Downhill complex in County Londonderry.

Aodan Farren, the PhD student who led the study added: "We must now move to increase awareness of the lizard population in Northern Ireland and protect their habitats, which are continuing to be altered by conversion to agriculture, planting of forests (afforestation), development of links golf courses, [invasive species](#) and infrastructure development."

Explaining what to look for when trying to spot a lizard, Dr Reid said: "The lizards which are found in Northern Ireland are usually 12 centimetres (5 in) long, excluding the tail, which can be almost twice as long as the body. The colour and patterning of this species is remarkably variable with the main colour being typically mid-brown, but it can be also grey, olive brown or black.

The study also pointed to the need for a Northern Ireland Lizard Survey to help gather more information on the reptiles.

More information: Farren, A., Prodöhl, P.A., Laming, P & Reid, N. (2010) Distribution of the common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) and landscape favourability for the species in Northern Ireland. *Amphibia-Reptilia* 31: 387-394.

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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