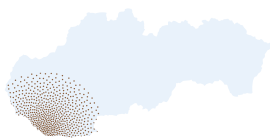




# Reptiles of Southwestern Slovakia



Snakes, lizards and turtles – beautiful and endangered animals  
we can admire with no worries.

Which species can be met around here?

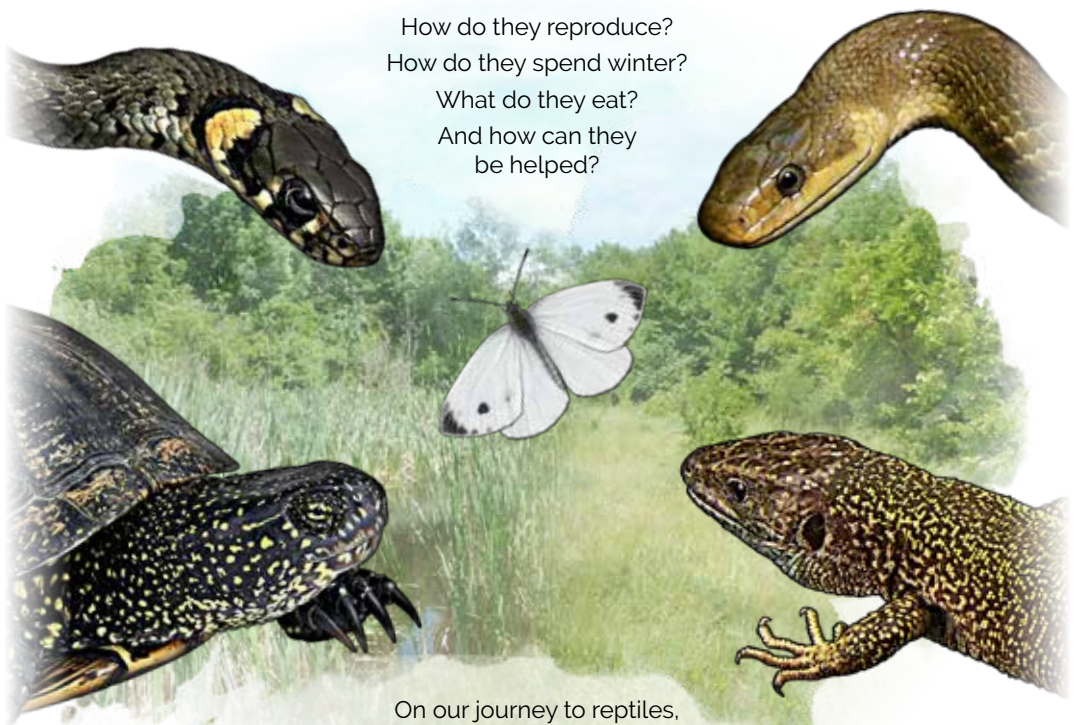
Where can we find them?

How do they reproduce?

How do they spend winter?

What do they eat?

And how can they  
be helped?



On our journey to reptiles,  
we will learn a lot of interesting facts about these animals...

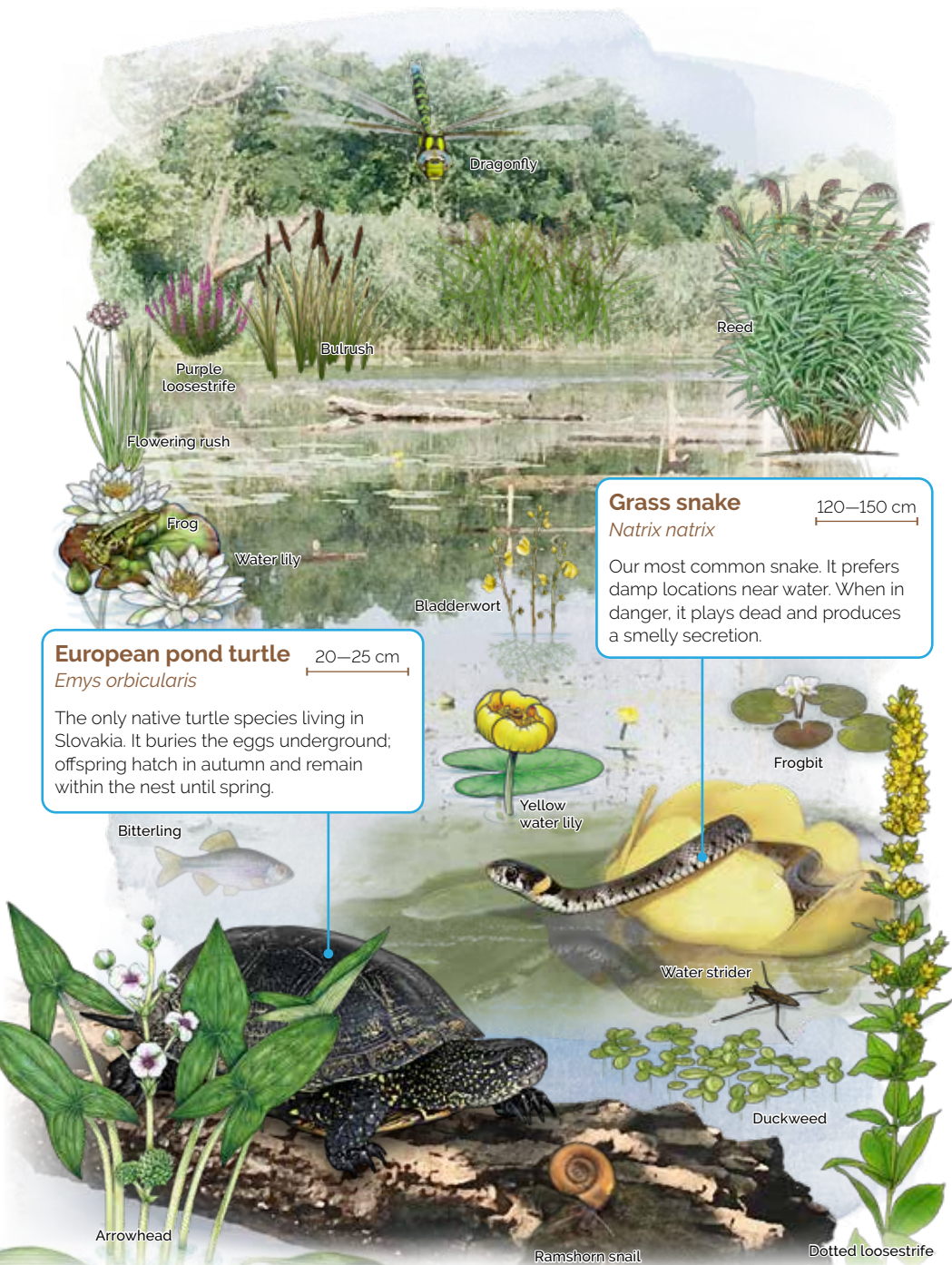
Watch them patiently but never touch them. When reptiles  
feel danger and cannot hide or escape, they will try to fight back.

More about reptiles: [www.plazyunas.com](http://www.plazyunas.com)



# • Oxbow Lake •

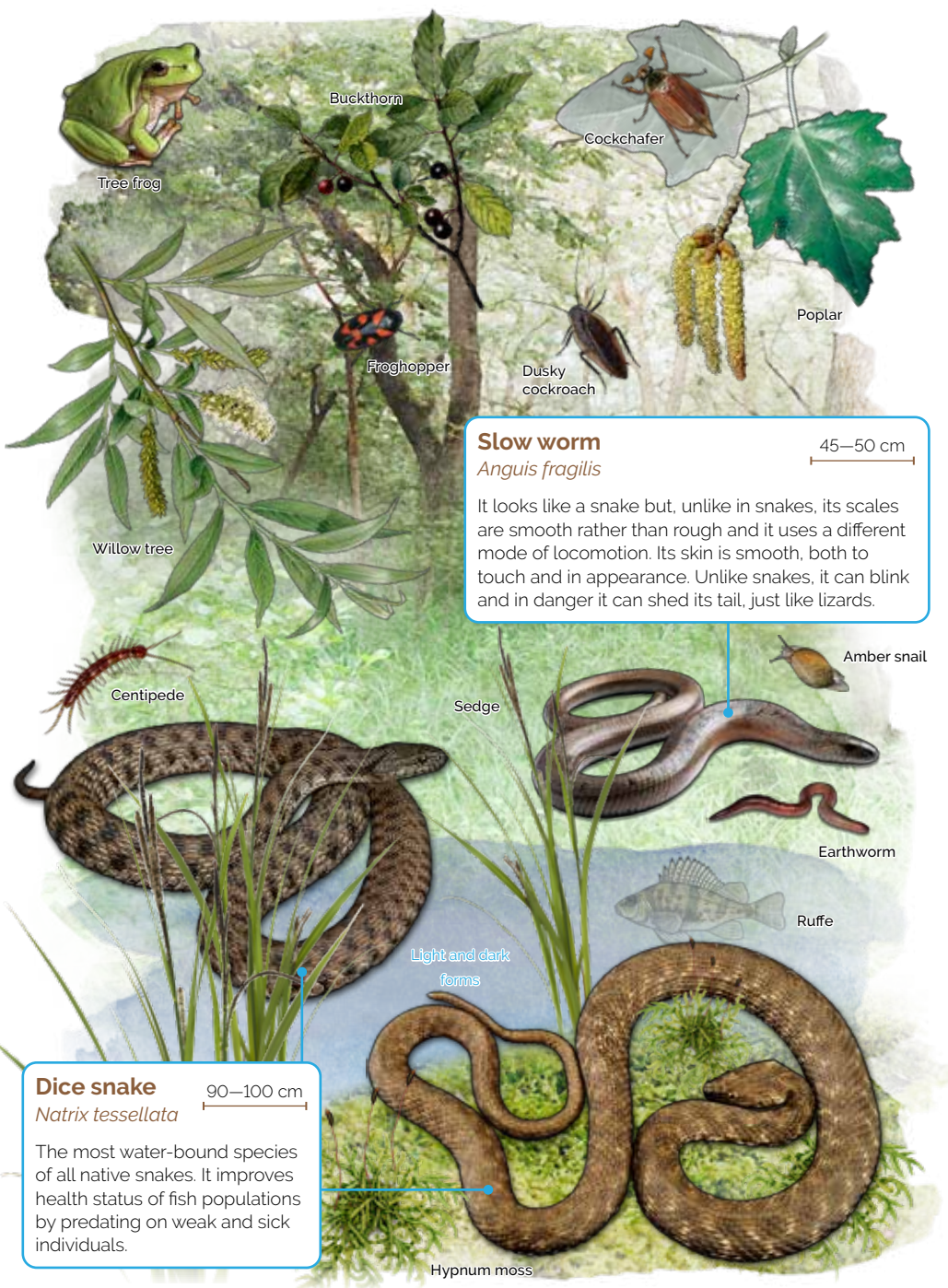
A pool of water that used to be a part of a river but has slowly sealed off completely from the river channel. Oxbow lakes have still waters, there is no water current.





# • Riparian Forest •

Forest formed at locations with high groundwater level, often near rivers. It is often subject to seasonal flooding.



# • Shrubbery •

Thick growth of woody plants, especially shrubs and young trees.



Spindle tree



Hawthorn



Dogwood



Drone fly



Swallowtail caterpillar



Rose



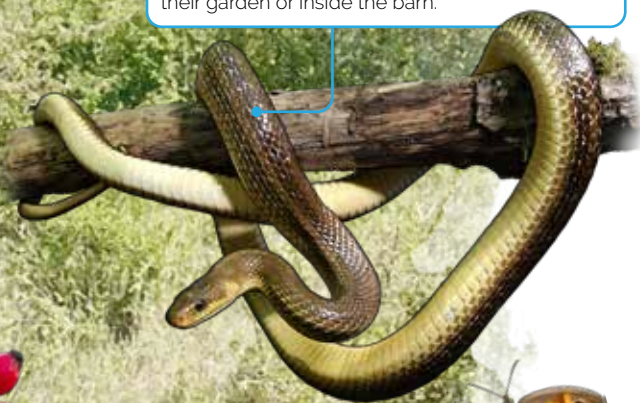
Hoverfly

## Aesculapian snake

*Zamenis longissimus*

150–170 cm

Our largest native snake. A 215 cm long specimen has been found in the past. It is a symbol of the medicine. This snake was worshipped by our ancestors and everyone wanted to have one in their garden or inside the barn.



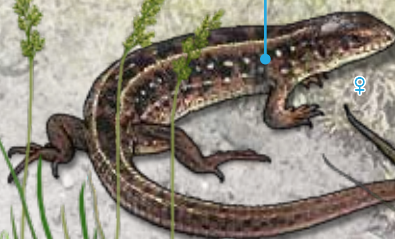
Ringlet

## Sand lizard

*Lacerta agilis*

16–20 cm

It lays eggs in piles of sand and soil in gardens and at construction sites where it is often found.



♀

♂



Wolf spider



Bromegrass



Snail

Ringlet caterpillar



Oil beetle

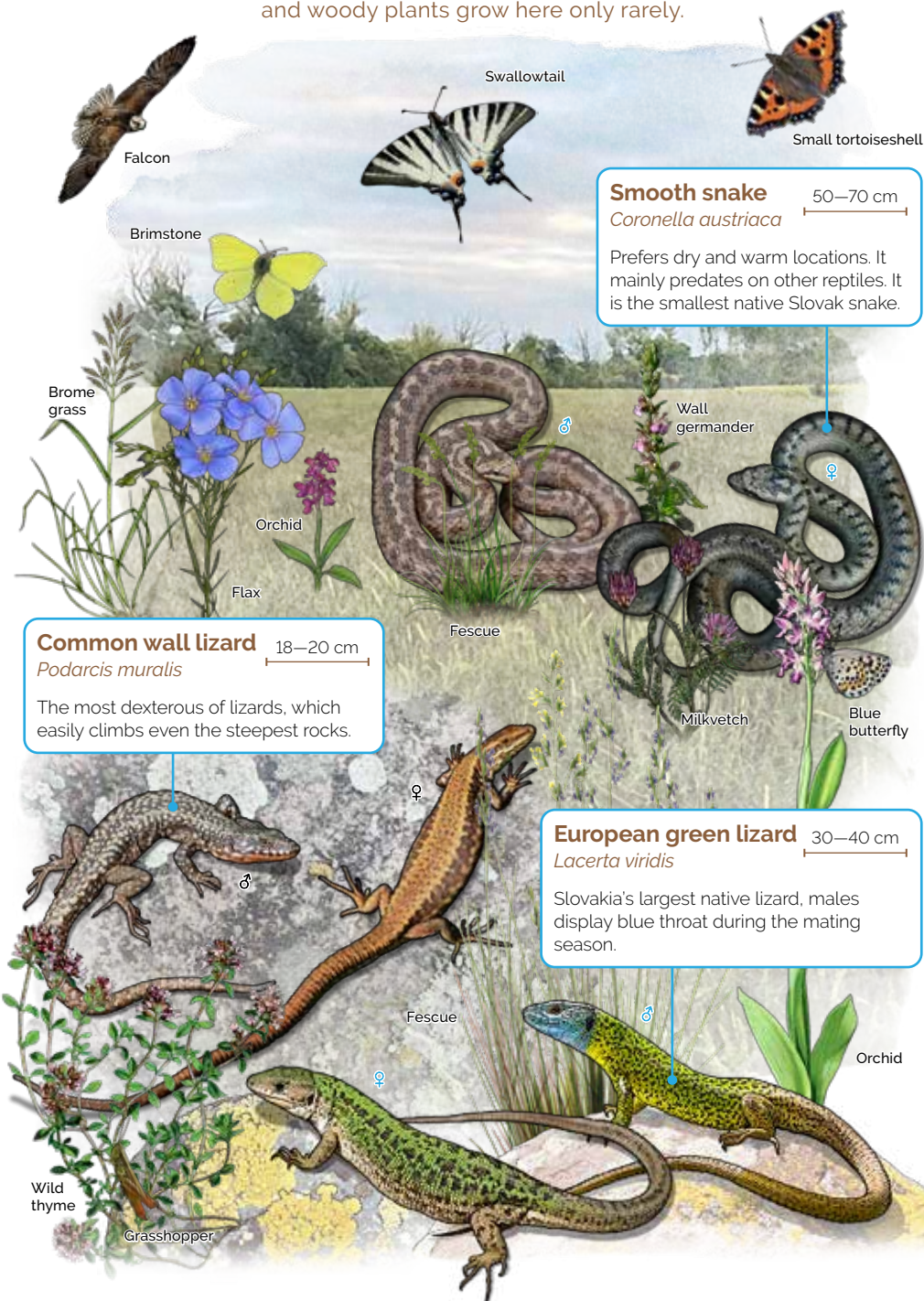
Fescue

Legend: ♀- female, ♂- male



# • Dry Meadow •

Mainly includes grasses and other herbaceous plants. There is little moisture and woody plants grow here only rarely.



## Smooth snake

*Coronella austriaca*

50—70 cm

Prefers dry and warm locations. It mainly predate on other reptiles. It is the smallest native Slovak snake.

## Common wall lizard

*Podarcis muralis*

18—20 cm

The most dexterous of lizards, which easily climbs even the steepest rocks.

## European green lizard

*Lacerta viridis*

30—40 cm

Slovakia's largest native lizard, males display blue throat during the mating season.

## Cold-bloodedness

Reptiles cannot regulate their body temperature, so they need to absorb heat from the sun, water or the ground. This makes them experts in saving energy, which makes them survive without feeding much longer than mammals or birds.

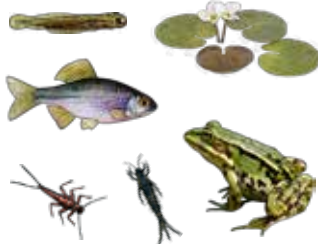
## Diet

**Hatchlings of snakes and lizards mostly** prey on insects and spiders.

**Slow worm** prefers earthworms and snails.

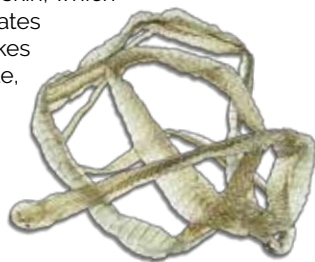
**Snakes** from the genus *Natrix* live near the water and mainly prey on frogs and other amphibians as well as fish. Other snakes feed on rodents and other small mammals, sometimes also other reptiles, our largest native snake species occasionally eats birds and their eggs.

**Turtles** prey on insects, their larvae and other invertebrates, smaller fish and frogs. Algae and parts of aquatic plants are an important part of the turtles' diet.



## Moulting

Reptiles moult regularly during their life. The old skin is made of dead cells pushed from below by the new-grown skin, which enlarges and accommodates to the growing body. Snakes moult their skin as a whole, lizards do so in parts. The turtles moult their skin too; even their shell skin changes during the growth.



## Reproduction

Most reptiles lay eggs with leathery shell. In turtles, the egg shell is calcareous, similar to that of birds. Some species are viviparous, giving birth to live offspring – from among reptiles of the Southwestern Slovakia, these include the smooth snake and the slow worm.

Young Aesculapian snake resembles the grass snake.



Hatching of the young grass snakes



Clutch of grass snake eggs





For their survival, reptiles require appropriate environment, wintering grounds, egg-laying site and shelters.

## Shelters

Protect them from predators and rapid changes in temperature and humidity. Lizards and snakes use piles of stones or branches as shelters. Turtles immerse in water or hide in reeds.

## Wintering Grounds

It is the place where the animals spend the winter season. The temperature does not drop too low to make the reptiles freeze. Reptiles can hibernate in piles of sand, manure, leaves and branches, in abandoned mines, caves, hollows under trees and rocks, in cellars and some spend winter underground.

## Egg-laying Site

Allows for incubation of eggs and hatching of offspring. It is made of materials that can produce heat or at least maintain temperature. Decomposing organic waste can serve such purpose, just like piles of leaves and wood, stacks of hay, straw and sawdust. Some lizard species bury their eggs in sand or soil, turtles do so in sandy soils.



Reptiles can find both appropriate shelter and wintering grounds in piles of rocks and stony walls.



Aesculapian snake rarely climbs trees – e.g. when foraging in bird nests.



European pond turtle hidden in duckweed.

Hatching of the sand lizard.



# What can we do for the reptiles?

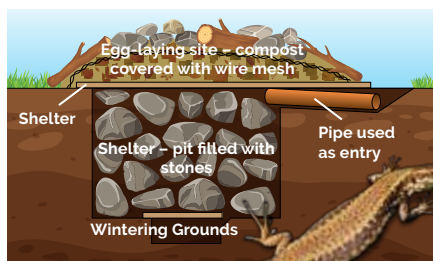
Many people can enjoy the presence of reptiles in their gardens – it is truly a precious piece of wilderness. Some may, however, be terrified. We assure you reptiles are nothing to fear of. Reptiles that naturally occur in gardens in the southwestern Slovakia are absolutely harmless to humans. Moreover, they are beneficial to us. The presence of reptiles results in decreased presence of insects, rodents and moles.

Reptiles can be attracted to the garden by building a south-facing rock garden with large stones. A perfect **shelter** for snakes and slow worms can be made of piles of stones scattered in the area, rock walls, piles of wood and branches. Old carpet or wood boards at unmaintained locations all over the garden will improve the shelter options for animals and prevent growth of undesired weeds.

**Appropriate wintering grounds** can be made from a stack of manure or sand, pits filled with plant-based waste. Cellars and other underground spaces are a great option, too.

Leaves collected at the outer boundary of the garden are excellent material **for egg-laying sites**. The leaves slowly turn into natural compost, which can serve as a high-quality fertilizer outside the winter hibernation and egg incubation season.

We can also create **the wintering grounds, egg-laying site and shelter** in one. At a location exposed to sunshine for the whole daytime (south face), excavate a 1 × 1 m pit at least 0,5 m deep. From one side, create a 20 cm deep, 1 m long channel and place an old pipe inside, which will serve as an entry. It should be ascending so that water does not flood the shelter. Fill the excavated pit with big stones (at least 20 cm in size) and cover them with metal sheet, wood board or polyethylene sheet to prevent clogging of the gaps between stones. This cover should be topped with plant-based waste that will turn into compost (leaves, grass clippings). Every now and then, this material should be refilled. The compost should be covered with about 5 cm wire mesh as protection from predators. Place stones, wood boards or branches on the wire mesh; they will serve as shelter, too.



## What to avoid?

Burning grass kills both reptiles and their prey, destroys shelters, egg-laying sites and wintering grounds. Pesticides and chemicals are harmful to us as well as to the reptiles and other animals living in our garden. Releasing pet turtles into the wild endangers populations of several protected animals, which are preyed upon by the turtles, and they also pose a threat to the native European pond turtle due to competition for food and territory. Do not remove leaves and other plant-based waste, fallen and old trees, do not disassemble compost and piles of sand during hibernation season (October to March) and egg incubation season (May to July).



Our work at DAPHNE has long-term focus on environmental education and creation of methodological materials for teachers. We also create inspiring tools and materials dedicated to protection and knowledge of the natural environment. We run programmes for schools, field trips for the general public, various activities for businesses. Get in touch to learn more.



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EKOLÓGIE

Zdrúženie priateľov herpetofauny (Association of Friends of Herpetofauna) – civil association set up to aid protection of reptiles in Slovakia. The main objective is to help change the mindset, address the people's prejudice and emphasize the importance of reptiles in our nature.

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