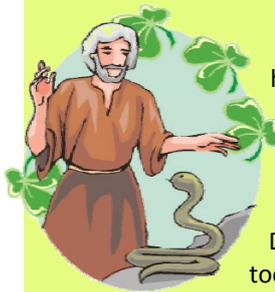


No Snakes in Ireland



Legend has it that Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, banished snakes from the island. He is said to have put them in a box and thrown the box in the sea.

Unfortunately scientists have found no evidence that there were ever snakes in Ireland. No fossils of snakes have been found anywhere in the country, which would have been the case if snakes had ever lived here.

During the Ice Age, Ireland and Britain would have been too cold for snakes to survive. As the ice melted and temperatures rose, animals made their way across land bridges from Europe. Though three species of snake managed to reach Britain, no snakes reached Ireland.

In the story of St Patrick, it is believed that snakes symbolized the pagan religion which St. Patrick banished from Ireland.

St Patrick's Day

Ireland's National Holiday is St. Patrick's Day and it is held on 17th March each year. It is a day of celebration for the Irish, at home and abroad. It is believed St. Patrick was born around 389 AD in either Wales or Scotland. As a 16 year old boy, he was kidnapped and brought to the mountains of Antrim, where he was kept as a slave for six years. One night God came to him in a dream and showed him how to escape from slavery, which he did. Having returned home to his family, he then went on to France where he became a priest and in time became a bishop. Again, God came to him in a dream and told him to return to Ireland to teach Christianity to the Irish. This he did for over 40 years.



Two reptiles in Ireland

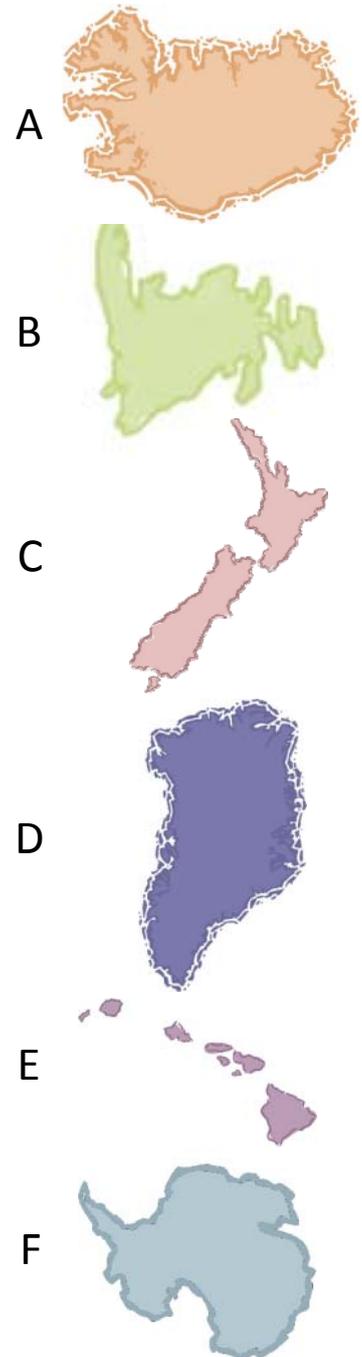
Though there are no snakes in Ireland, there are two land reptiles in Ireland. However, only one of these, the Common or Viviparous Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), is native. Commonly found throughout Ireland, there is a chance you might see this four-legged creature sunbathing on a stone wall on a hot summer's day.

The other reptile that can be found in Ireland is the Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*). It was introduced into Co. Clare in the 1970s and is confined to this area. The Slow Worm is a legless lizard and looks remarkably like a snake.

The Irish Wildlife Trust are asking people to help them by reporting sightings of the Common Lizard. So if you see one, contact them at research@iwt.ie. Ideally take a picture and email it to them as well and this will confirm the identification.

Other parts of the world without snakes

There are other islands around the world that do not have snakes. Can you identify some of these islands below? The maps are not to scale.



Clues: A = A thermal island; B = On the east coast of Canada; C = Home of the Maoris; D = Whiter than its name suggest!; E = Volcanic islands in the Pacific; F = A cold continent. Answers on page 13.