

The wild snakes invading Welsh homes

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Good neighbours: Aesculapian snakes seem to coexist happily with normal suburban wildlife, and there are no indications that their presence is affecting native species.

Should they be allowed to stay? A group of sneaky snakes from warmer climes is seeking refuge in insulated Welsh walls and lofts. Some say it should make us reflect on how our changing world is disrupting nature.

What's happening?

One of Europe's largest snake species, the Aesculapian, has been found living in walls and lofts in Colwyn Bay, North Wales.

Native to central and southern Europe, a number of the snakes escaped from the Welsh Mountain Zoo in the 1970s, and have survived and thrived by hiding from the winter cold in warm houses.

Some people have called for them to be removed. But others say we should welcome them.

Find out more

The Aesculapian lived in the British Isles before modern humans, but went **extinct** around 300,000 years ago.

And now, thanks to global warming, they are better suited to our climate than the now too-hot areas of southern Europe from where they came.

A study from 2018 showed that roughly half of species are now migrating in response to climate change.

Migration patterns have changed too. Chinook salmon, the largest species of Pacific salmon, has moved for the first time into Arctic rivers to escape the warming sea.

Should they be allowed to stay?

Some say

Yes! We should be welcoming them with open arms.

Others think

No! Such huge snakes are troublesome and they can do damage to houses when they live in walls and attics. Boot them out or catch them all and put them back in a zoo.

Six steps to discovery

Some people say

1. Connect

"In our hands now lies not only our own future, but that of all other living creatures with whom we share the Earth."

David Attenborough (1926 –), British broadcaster, biologist, natural historian and writer

What do you think?

How do you feel about this story? - Are you scared of snakes? What would you do if you found a snake in your wall?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: What other reptiles have been affected by climate change? How many snakes are there in Wales?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Find out what other types of snakes live in the British Isles.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Imagine you live in North Wales and have one of these snakes in your roof. What would you do?

5. Express

What do others believe? - In small groups, design an animal which has adapted to survive the climate crisis. What features would it have to withstand extreme weather and other disasters? Where would it live? What would it look like?

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - It is 2100 and almost every animal has gone extinct. Write a short story describing how wonderful the natural world used to be before it lost its beautiful wildlife.

Glossary

Extinct - A species that no longer has any living members.