

# British Nature Guide

## Why living things are given a scientific name



Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*



Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*

If you read a book about birds or plants, or any living thing, you will see that most species have two names. The first is a common name such as Canada Goose, Dandelion or Grass Snake, the second is a scientific name. Sometimes a species might only have a scientific name.

The scientific name is usually written in *italics*. The first word starts with a capital letter, the second word starts with a lower case letter.



Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*

The first part of the scientific name is the family name. When we look at the Canada Goose above we can see that it is in the *Branta* family. The second name, *canadensis*, tells you which member of the family it is.

The Brent Goose *Branta bernicla* is also in the *Branta* family, but to distinguish it from other species in the family it has a different second name *bernicla*.

### An example of why this system is useful

In some parts of Britain the Lapwing is known as the Peewit, in other places it is known as Green Plover. Until you look at the scientific name, *Vanellus vanellus*, you might think that these were three different species of bird.