

Reptiles

Protected Species
Guidance Note: 2014

Survey Season Calendar

| Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|-----|-----|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
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| | | Optimal | Optimal | Optimal | Optimal | Sub-optimal | Sub-optimal | Optimal | Sub-optimal | Inappropriate | Inappropriate |



Why Survey?

Many of our native species of reptile have similar habitat requirements. Favoured sites for common lizards, slow-worms and adders include heathland, scrub and areas of rough grassland. Grass snakes largely predate on amphibians so are usually found within the vicinity of water (ponds, lakes, ditches, canals, gravel pits), adjacent to open terrestrial habitat. If you are planning any works which involve ground excavation or vegetation clearance, you should consider the potential disturbance to reptiles. The local planning authority may request that you complete a survey to identify if reptiles are present, prior to giving approval.

Methodology

Reptile survey methodology follows guidelines set out in the Herpetofauna Workers' Manual (JNCC). A standard presence or absence survey involves setting out artificial refugia across a site. The density that these refugia sheets are laid is dependent on the quality of the habitat.

Sheets of roofing felt or tin of approximately 0.5m² are placed within habitats most likely to support reptiles. These include likely basking spots (south facing unshaded slopes and open patches next to cover), foraging habitat (areas of longer grass and scrub), and next to potential hibernation sites (piles of rubble or logs, disused rabbit warrens and cracked building foundations). Reptiles (if present) can often be seen basking on or sheltering underneath these sheets.

The active season for reptiles runs from late March to the end of September. However, this is dependent on the weather conditions, with cold springs delaying individuals coming out of hibernation. Reptiles require warmth from the sun to regulate their body temperature, achieving this through 'basking'. The lower the ambient air temperature, the more time is needed to warm up. This increases the chance of recording individuals during surveys, with key months being April, May and September. Reptiles mate in April and May, which further increases the chances of recording individuals during these months, when they are often more visible and less wary of human disturbance.

Checking refugia is undertaken on a minimum of seven separate occasions during the survey period. Weather conditions are recorded during each visit, with surveys not carried out during heavy rain, strong wind, or when temperatures are below 10°C or above 17°C. Hazy sunshine often produces the best results, especially between intermittent showers.

SERVICES:

- Presence and absence surveys
- Advice on legislation and best practice
- Bespoke method statements
- Habitat creation and enhancement (including installation of hibernacula)
- Reptile capture and translocations
- Site supervision (Ecological Clerk of Works)



Mitigation

Mitigation measures are often similar to that for great crested newts. Options can include exclusion from parts of the site by use of one-way fencing, capture and translocation, or maintaining the population in-situ, within a safe receptor area. A new Mitigation Guidance document produced by Natural England has recently been withdrawn to include modifications to the content, based on feedback by consultants. The new guidelines will include changes to survey timings and the minimum number of visits required. Upon re-publication, we will update this section with the new recommended mitigation methodology and optimal survey season.

Licensing

Presence and absence survey work (including population estimates) for reptiles does not currently require a licence or licensed surveyors. However, if either of the more heavily protected species (sand lizard and smooth snake) are found on site, then a Natural England licence for their trapping and translocation would be required. The purpose of the licence is to allow works to continue which would either disturb or impact upon these species and their habitat.

Avoid committing an offence:

- Any development-related activities on the site such as vegetation clearance or excavations in areas of suitable reptile habitat (grassland, woodland or scrub) may potentially affect these species
 - The removal of piles of debris or rubble, and activities that involve the removal of or interference with water-bodies, create a potential risk of killing, injuring or disturbing reptiles
 - As a result, safeguards must be implemented to protect these species from impacts such as habitat loss and isolation, including mitigation, habitat creation, and working under approved method statements
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