

Reptiles

Ecology

Within the UK there are six species of reptile adder, grass snake, common lizard, slow-worm, smooth snake and sand lizard.

Adder, grass snake, common lizard and slow-worm are relatively widespread in the south of the UK becoming more patchily distributed further north. They can occupy a range of habitat types, with grass snakes being particularly associated with wetland habitats and adders within heathland and dry woodlands. Common Lizard and slow-worm tend to occur in areas of unmanaged grassland and scrub, even occurring in people's gardens. Within particularly favourable areas of habitats all four species can be present.



Smooth snake and sand lizard are the UK's rarest reptiles, present at a small number of heathland sites in the south of England, with sand lizards also restricted to a few heathland as well as coastal sites in south England, north-west coast and parts of North Wales.

Legislation

Within the UK all reptile species are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) with adder, slow-worm, common lizard and grass snake receiving partial protection (protection against killing and injury) and smooth snake and sand lizard receiving full protection (protection from killing and injury, protection from disturbance, as well as their habitats being protected).

Planning and survey effort

To adequately inform a planning application an assessment of the suitability of a development site to support reptiles should be assessed as part of a preliminary ecological survey/ extended Phase 1 habitat survey.

As the four commoner species of reptile only receive partial protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) there is scope on smaller sites with connectivity to areas of further suitable habitat or where significant areas of vegetation are being retained, that where suitable habitat is present, reptiles



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are assumed to be present and mitigation implemented on this basis. In these scenarios mitigation would involve habitat manipulation to encourage reptiles to 'vacate' the development footprint. This is termed passive removal or displacement and is carried out by directional vegetation removal within the works area to areas of retained and enhanced habitat. This can avoid the need to undertake surveys which can be quite time consuming.

On larger sites or sites where the mitigation described above cannot be implemented then presence/absence surveys will need to be undertaken.

Surveys for reptiles can only be undertaken when reptiles are active (normally March to October) but are highly weather dependent, needing to be undertaken on days when the temperature is above 10°C but does not exceed 20°C. and no heavy rain.

Surveys typically involves the placement of artificial refugia, usually pieces of roofing felt or corrugated metal, measuring 0.5 m², within suitable areas of habitat. These are then left for a two weeks to 'bed' in before being checked on seven separate occasions for reptiles which are basking on or sheltering underneath the refugia. Survey visits should be separated by at least four days Further surveys may be required in order to estimate population size, this will provide information for the required mitigation measures.



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