

Advice note for developers in Devon

Reptiles

The notes below give headline advice only and may not include the latest information as legislation and guidance is subject to change. Please seek professional advice.

When do I need to consider reptiles?

Reptiles are protected under national legislation. If you are carrying out any work that could harm them you should obtain advice from a [suitably experienced and licensed ecologist](#).

Reptiles are found in a wide variety of habitats including rough grassland (including areas such as field margins, allotments, road verges, railway embankments, derelict land and brownfield sites), heathland, scrubby areas, open woodland and woodland edge, watercourses, standing open water (lakes, ponds) and hedges (also see 'basic ecology' below).

Examples of suitable reptile habitat



Activities that could harm reptiles include:

- Habitat loss e.g. through clearance of vegetation, removing rubble / wood piles and other debris
- Damage to habitat e.g. cutting vegetation and driving machinery over sensitive areas.
- Predation by domestic cats.

A simple way of knowing whether you need to obtain advice is to fill in the [Devon Wildlife Trigger Table](#) (most of the impacts listed are relevant to reptiles). If you are applying for planning permission from DCC please follow the [Wildlife Planning Guidance for Applicants](#). If applying for planning permission from another LPA please follow their guidance. If you are taking forward a DCC project that doesn't need planning permission please follow the internal Environmental Review guidance.

Basic ecology and distribution in Devon

There are six native reptiles found in the UK, and all are found in Devon.

- **Adder.** Prefer heathland but may also be found in grassland and woodland edge. Adults are usually up to 66 cms long with a black zigzag along the length of the back. Feed mainly on field voles but also mice, lizards, nestling birds, eggs and amphibians.
- **Common (or viviparous) lizard.** Found on heathland and areas of rough grassland, especially with warm stoney basking sites. Eat mainly insects and small snails. Widespread in Devon.
- **Grass snake.** Found in a variety of habitats with a supply of amphibians e.g.heathland, rough grassland and wetlands. Adults are around 120 cms long, dark green with black vertical bars and spots. Good swimmers. Feed mainly on amphibians such as toads, frogs, newts and small fish. Widespread in Devon.
- **Slow worm.** Legless lizards found in heathland, rough grassland and patchy scrub (found in gardens and common in allotments). Feed mainly on slugs but also eat worms, spider and snails. Common and widespread in Devon.
- **Smooth snake.** Only known to be present on East Devon Heaths in very low numbers (reintroduced as part of species recovery programme).
- **Sand lizard.** Only known to be present at Dawlish Warren and Braunton Burrows.

Reptiles require a varied habitat structure that provides shelter, a range of shady and sunny spots, and frost-free areas to spend the winter. Being cold-blooded, reptiles need warm sites for basking to raise their body temperature. The open, dry nature of heathlands and chalk and acid grasslands often provide these basking areas, as well as plenty of cover and food, and are the habitats with which most reptiles are commonly associated. The exception is the grass snake, which prefers wetland habitats.

Most reptiles hibernate (in burrows or under logs and rocks) between mid-October and March, when weather conditions are unsuitable for activity.

Snakes can occupy fairly large ranges, sometimes covering several kilometres during the course of a year. They often move from drier habitats to wetter ones for the summer months, and return to the same hibernation areas each winter. Lizards have smaller ranges than snakes, normally staying close to small landscape features such as embankments. Common lizards and sand lizards spend much time basking, while slow worms are often hidden in vegetation, under refuges or underground. .

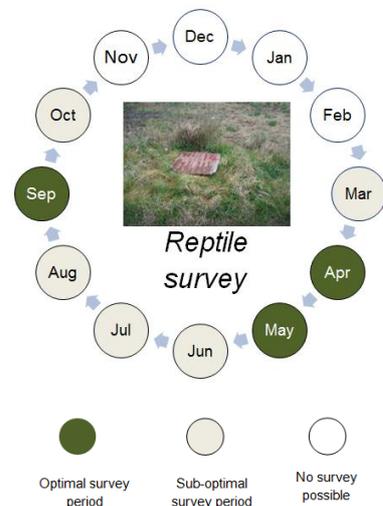
Surveys – quick overview

Survey may be needed in order to determine and address impacts. There are two main survey methods **both of which can only be carried out in suitable weather when reptiles are active.**

Direct observation - involves searching areas favoured by reptiles e.g. scrubby areas, rough grassland, under logs or rubbish etc.

Refuge survey - using artificial refugia, usually consisting of 0.5m² pieces of mineral roofing felt or corrugated metal, spread over areas likely to be used by reptiles.

Natural England is currently producing technical guidance on reptile survey. Please check their [website](#) and [Standing Advice for Reptiles](#) for any updated guidance.



Legislation and licensing - headlines

Under the the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 \(as amended\)](#) it is an offence to deliberately kill or injure, trade or sell any reptile.

The smooth snake and sand lizard receive additional protection under the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 \(as amended\)](#) making them [European Protected Species \(EPS\)](#). These species occur on protected sites in Devon. If advice is needed please contact a suitably experienced ecological consultant and Natural England.

Avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures

Everything should be done to avoid impacts. Where this is not possible mitigation and compensation measures should be proportionate to the impact and ideally result in enhanced habitat and connectivity for reptiles. Further information can be found in [Natural England's Standing Advice](#).

Examples of measures are given below. However these are for illustrative purposes only and you should follow the advice given by your consultant.

Examples of avoidance measures:

- Design the scheme in order to protect reptile habitat.

Examples of mitigation measures:

- Encourage reptiles to leave the development area through habitat manipulation e.g. careful strimming of long grass areas to ~ 10 cms to make them unsuitable for reptiles. This is best done when reptiles are in hibernation and should only be done where there is suitable adjacent habitat for them to move to and with advice from your consultant.

Examples of compensation & enhancement measures

- Onsite habitat enhancement including habitat creation (e.g. reptile hibernacula).
- Selection and management of a suitable receptor site (preferable adjacent to the development site) for translocation of reptiles.

Where should I go for further information?

- Natural England (2012) Standing Advice Species Sheet – [Reptiles](#)
- Defra advice on [building near protected species](#)
- Natural England (2004) [Reptiles: guidelines for developers \(IN151\)](#)
- [Amphibian and reptile groups of the UK \(ARG\)](#)
- [Froglife](#)
- [Devon Biodiversity Records Centre](#)
- [Devon Wildlife Planning Guidance](#)
- [Biodiversity Planning Toolkit](#)
- [Devon's Hedges](#)

Important note

Legislation, survey guidelines, species distribution and best practice mitigation may be subject to change and this note may not necessarily include the latest information. Please seek professional advice.

This Advice Note was produced by DCC's Ecologist with input and advice from Richard Green Ecology and using Dorset County Council's advice notes. If you have any comments on this Advice Note or ideas for improvement please email nature@devon.gov.uk



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