

# Amphibian and Reptile Precautionary working method statement and Toolbox Talk

# Vyrnwy reserve, Montgomery Canal

Reptiles and amphibians can be found in a variety of habitats. Although some species, such as common frogs and smooth newts are widespread, all species (including protected species such as great crested newts) are under threat from habitat loss, pollution, killing and other issues, meaning populations are in decline. At this site, while significant impacts and harm have been ruled out through the ecological surveys, there is a chance reptiles and amphibians could be present on site, as they will use habitats that typically comprise wetland, woodland, trees, scrub and hedgerows.

# LEGAL PROTECTION:

In the UK, the more common, or widespread reptiles (slow-worm, common lizard and grass snake) are protected from being injured or killed under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Breaking the law is punishable by fines or time in prison. Great crested newts and their habitat are legally protected from harm and disturbance. The more common amphibians are not protected by law from killing but given their poor conservation status, good practice is recommended to ensure protection during construction works.





The likely species that could be found at this site are shown in the photos above.

<u>Common toad</u> – have a dry, 'warty', skin and they tend to move by walking on all 4 legs. They are shades of brown with a lighter belly.

<u>Common frog</u> – have a wet and shiny skin that is green to brown. They often have black bands on their legs and move by hopping.

<u>Grass snake</u> – are a large snake (up to 1m) that often lives near water. They are grey/green with a yellow collar and black bars down their sides.

<u>Common lizard</u> – brown skin that might have some patterns and is dry with scales. They will quickly hide away when disturbed but can often be seen basking in the sun.

<u>Slow worm</u> – a legless lizard, not a snake! They are difficult to see as they spend most of their time underground or under logs. They are shiny and usually darker than grass snakes.

<u>Smooth newt</u> – small at 10cm with brown skin that looks wet like a frog. They may have spots on their sides.

<u>Great crested newt</u> – The UKs largest newt species, up to 17cm long, with a dark brown or black warty skin, a bright orange underside with irregular black blotches.

# Considerations for the species and site work

The **amphibians** (toads, frogs and newts) will hide during the day, especially on sunny days, in logs piles, dense vegetation, leaf litter and under cut vegetation. Even within piles of rubble or folded materials. Anywhere that is damp and safe. They come out at night to feed.

**Grass snakes** will bask in the sun and usually around dense vegetation like reeds in the canal, log piles and other piles of debris. They will readily swim and if cornered may 'play dead'.

**Common lizards** like sunny places for basking. It is usually found in dry, exposed locations where dense cover exists close by like dry stone walls, heathland and embankments.

Slow worms are very shy creatures and very difficult to see. They hide underground, in piles of logs, rocks and debris, and within dense vegetation or leaf litter.

Of particular note is that these animals are particularly vulnerable during the winter when they are hibernating or during the summer when they are sheltering from hot, dry conditions. Some species of reptile will breed within habitat such as piles of decaying vegetation. If they are accidentally disturbed, there is a greater risk of harm during these conditions.

Some common places that reptiles and amphibians will shelter or hibernate are shown in the pictures below.



Potential sheltering and hibernation areas Potential grass snake breeding habitat

## 'PRECAUTIONARY WORKING METHOD' to be implemented during the works:

Clearance of tree / woody vegetation or completing work in areas with leaf litter or vegetative ground cover have the potential to impact upon reptiles and amphibians. The Ecological Clerk of Works (Ecologist) will be present in advance of works commencing to brief contractors and to avoid potential breaches of legislation. The Precautionary Method comprises:

All contractors (including staff undertaking vegetation works and staff undertaking construction works) must read and sign this toolbox talk to confirm they are aware of the legal protection of reptiles and amphibians. The working methods required below are relevant more to Vegetation Management staff to prevent any possible impacts. However, all construction phase staff must read the Toolbox talk to ensure they are aware of the species while works are ongoing.

 Removal of vegetation and site clearance will be scheduled to occur from April to end of October under suitable weather conditions (as determined by the ecologist, based on best practice guidelines) to minimise the risk of encountering hibernating reptiles or amphibians, whilst ensuring the species are still in their active state. However, clearance of dense scrub or trees during spring and summer may also impact nesting birds, therefore careful coordination between the Ecologist and contractors on timing and methods of works is essential.

- Prior to vegetation clearance commencing, the vegetation to be removed and the base of any trees to be cut will be thoroughly checked by a suitably experienced ecologist. The check will encompass all vegetation to be impacted, including both vegetation to be removed, and any vegetation that could be inadvertently impacted or disturbed during the clearance works. This includes areas of ground likely to be impacted by the works (e.g. areas where felled trees will fall, or resulting timber will be stacked).
- No plant or machinery to enter the areas of tall vegetation and all works are completed via 'walking access' only.
- If no reptiles, amphibians or nesting birds are found, then vegetation clearance works can commence. The vegetation will be cleared in a single direction back towards areas of retained habitat. Care will be taken not to isolate or cut off any area of vegetation to be removed during the works.
- Vegetation should be cut in a phased approach to 30cm above ground-level using handheld tools (e.g. chainsaws) and the arisings should be checked again before being stacked or removed. A further cut to ground level will follow 48 hours later.
- The cut vegetation will ideally be taken offside immediately. If some of it is to remain on site, it must be stacked in a location away from existing habitat, but also away from the site compound and working areas. It must only be moved under the instruction of the ECoW.
  Some material will be placed in undisturbed locations to create new habitat for the species via log piles as directed by the ECoW.
- The cut stumps and roots of the felled trees must be removed with the ECoW present and done slowly to be able to check the ground for animals.
- The storage of materials onsite could encourage animals to shelter, or even hibernate within. Ideally, piles of materials like stone, wood and building debris will be stored in containers, skips or off the ground. Waste materials must be put into skips or other containers and taken offsite as soon as possible.

With the above mitigation measures in place, no offences relating to reptiles of amphibians are predicted as a result of the proposed works.

## CONTRACTORS - WHAT TO DO IF YOU DISCOVER A REPTILE OR AMPHIBIAN:

- 1). Stop all works in the area immediately;
- 2). Immediately inform the supervising ecologist for further advice; and
- 3). Do not recommence works until given clearance by the supervising ecologist.

## **CONFIRMATION:**

Please sign to confirm you have received the toolbox talk and understand the Precautionary Working Methods to be implemented.

Date	Name	Signature