

Report on Reptile Survey results in 2016

Introduction

In 2011 and 2012 the reptiles were surveyed which demonstrated that the site was an excellent site for Slow worms and Grass snakes and a good site for Common lizards and Adders. Following a gap of 5 years it was decided to conduct a reptile survey in 2016 to assess trends in reptile populations. This was driven in part by an impression that reptile populations, particularly Adders, had declined.

Methodology

There were 52 refugia the majority of which were roof felt placed in broadly the same locations as had been placed in the previous surveys. These locations had been identified as promising in 2011.

Surveys were conducted approximately every two weeks, a total of 20 times between 16th March and 28th November of which 4 were partial surveys. No reptiles were recorded on the 16th March and there were no reptiles recorded in the three surveys conducted in November. There were 16 surveys between the 4th April and the 19th October of which 4 were partial surveys.

Results

Reptiles were found under 44 of the 52 locations at some point during the season.

A total of 233 reptile sightings were recorded during the year. Excluding Partial surveys an average of 16.3 reptiles were recorded on each survey. The average for Slow worms was 9.62 and an average for Grass snakes was 5.5.

Peak count occurred on the 31st August when 48 reptiles comprising 16 Grass snakes, 25 Slow worms and 7 Adders.

Common lizards were rarely encountered with three sightings over the entire season.

Interpreting the results

The table below formed part of the report prepared by Barry Kemp in 2012 and details the Key Reptile Site Criteria.

	Low Population Score 1	Good Population Score 2	Excellent Population Score 3
Adder	<5	5-10	>10
Grass Snake	<5	5-10	>10
Slow Worm	<5	5-20	>20
Lizard	<5	5-20	>20

Based on the results from this year's survey one could argue that Markstakes Common remains an excellent site for Slow Worms and Grass Snakes and a

good site for Adders. Based on this year's observations one would struggle to argue for a good population of Common lizards.

Comparisons with 2011 and 2012.

In 2011 there were 43 refugia in the survey and this was increased by a further 17 in 2012. Surveys were conducted weekly between 27th March and 12th Oct in 2012 with a shorter survey period in 2011.

The average number of reptiles observed per survey in 2011 was 23 and the average number of reptiles observed in 2012 was 35. These numbers are considerably higher.

The Table below shows the peak observations for 2011 and 2012 with 2016 included for comparison.

	Date	Peak count	2016
Adders	16 August 2011	6	7
Grass snakes	2 nd August 2012	29	16
Slow worms	9 th August 2012	59	25
Common Lizards	2 nd August 2012	5	1

With the exception of Adders, the peak counts for 2016 are considerably lower than in 2011/2012. The averages are also lower.

Conclusion

There may be factors that have led to lower counts this year. Surveyor experience may be one as one of the surveyors in 2012 was particularly adept at finding reptile in close vicinity. Increased disturbance or adverse weather conditions may also be a factor. It is probably too soon to draw conclusions and the survey work will be repeated this year but we should be mindful of the needs of reptiles when undertaking conservation work on the Common.