



The Croft Medical Centre, Eastergate, West Sussex

Reptile Survey Report

Produced for Montagu Evans LLP

By Applied Ecology Ltd

October 2016

Document Control:

Version	Date	Version Details	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
1.0	28.10.2016	Final	PL	RJH	DP

Prepared for: Montagu Evans LLP

Title: The Croft Medical Centre, Eastergate, West Sussex – Reptile Survey Report

Project number: AEL1220

Document version: 1.0

Document status: Final

Document date: 28.10.2016

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1 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 Applied Ecology Ltd (AEL) was commissioned by Montagu Evans LLP (on behalf of the Croft Medical Practice), to undertake an ecological appraisal of an area of land located to the north and west of the existing Croft Medical Centre in Eastergate, near Chichester, West Sussex (central grid reference SU 94668 05690). The site location is shown in **Figure 1.1**.
- 1.2 The survey was required to inform the proposed development of a new medical centre, and was undertaken in June 2016¹. The survey identified the need for a reptile survey on the basis of suitable reptile habitat being present, but set out a proposed worst case scenario reptile mitigation strategy that assumed reptiles are present across the site, and proposed using land to the north of the application site (also within the ownership of Croft Medical Centre) as a reptile receptor area if reptiles presence was confirmed. The location of the land ownership boundary and the application site is shown by **Figure 1.2**. All land within the ownership boundary was surveyed for reptiles.
- 1.3 This report summarises the findings of the reptile survey, and outlines recommendations, where necessary, for associated mitigation in line with best practice guidelines.

Reptile Legislation & Ecology

Legislation

- 1.4 All UK native reptile species are protected by law. The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (and later amendments) provides the legal framework for this protection. Sand lizard *Lacerta agilis* and smooth snake *Coronella austriaca* are rare species that have restricted distributions in the UK and the greatest level of legal protection but do not occur in Essex.
- 1.5 The more widespread and common reptile species, namely common lizard, slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, grass snake, and adder *Vipera berus* are protected against deliberate or reckless killing and injury. Natural England (formerly English Nature²) considered that reptiles are likely to be threatened and the law breached by activities such as the following:
 - archaeological and geotechnical investigations;
 - clearing land, installing site offices or digging foundations;
 - cutting vegetation to a low height;
 - laying pipelines or installing other services;
 - driving machinery over sensitive areas;
 - removing rubble, wood piles and other debris.

¹ Applied Ecology Ltd (July, 2016) *The Croft Medical Centre, Eastergate, West Sussex – Ecology Report*. Report for Montagu Evans LLP.

² English Nature (2004) *Reptiles: guidelines for developers*.



- 1.6 Under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, a conviction can result in a fine, and/or up to six months imprisonment for each offence. Harm to more than one animal may be taken as separate offences.

Reptile ecology

Common lizard

- 1.7 The common lizard *Lacerta vivipara* is the UK's most widespread reptile species inhabiting a wide variety of habitat types including woodland, heathland, sand dunes and hedgerows. They emerge from hibernation in March and immediately the males actively seek mates. Litter size ranges between 3 and 12 and the young are born from June-September. Males become sexually mature at around two years of age, while in females it is three years of age. In order to hunt, it is essential that common lizards spend parts of each day basking in the sun until their body temperature reaches 30 degrees Celsius. Hunting occurs during the day, and they spend the night beneath logs, stones and other suitable shelters. Preferred prey items include earthworms, snails, various insects and spiders.

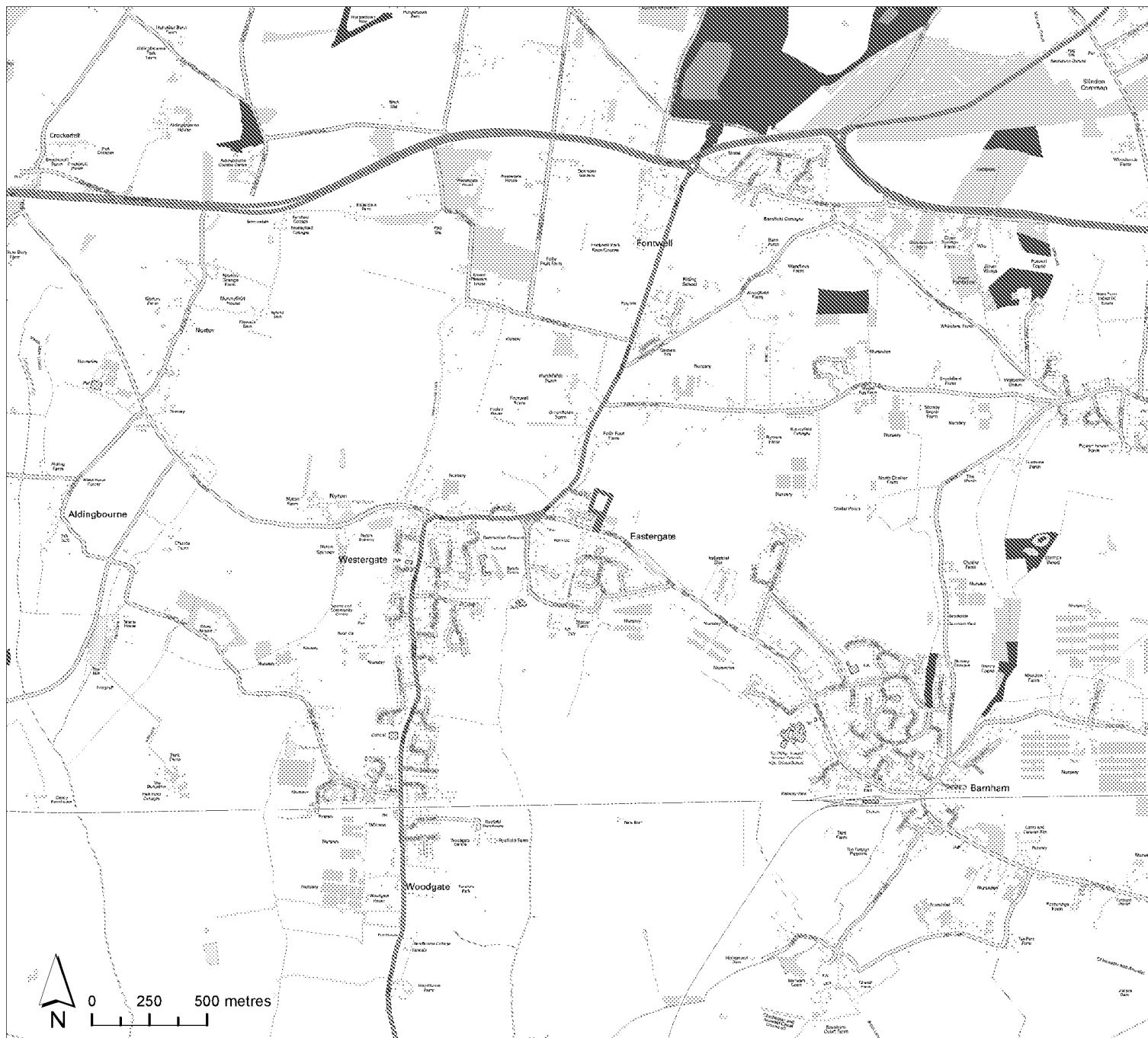
Slow-worm

- 1.8 Slow-worms *Anguis fragilis* can be found in a diverse range of humid habitats across the whole of Britain, but their populations are highest in the southern counties. Slow-worms inhabit open countryside and urban habitats and can be found in woodland, grassland, heathland, gardens, allotments, and abandoned/derelict land. They spend much of their time in deep cover beneath logs and rocks or below ground in holes, tunnels, crevices or in soil surface layers. Despite its snake-like appearance the slow-worm is a lizard (but with no visible legs). Slow-worms mate in April-May, and live young are born in late summer. An average of 6-12 young (although as many as 26 have been recorded) are born after a gestation period of 3-5 months. Slow-worms hunt after dusk or following rainfall and they concentrate on slow-moving prey invertebrate prey such as slugs. Slow-worms hibernate throughout the winter months, sometimes sharing hibernacula with other reptile species.

Grass snake

- 1.9 The grass snake *Natrix natrix* is the UK's only egg-laying snake; mating occurs in April-May and the clutch of eggs (8-40, depending upon the size of the female) is laid in July-August. Grass snakes will make use of man-made features for egg-laying, such as compost or manure heaps. Such features create warm conditions that facilitate development of the leathery eggs and hatching usually occurs 6-8 weeks after egg-laying. A communal nest site may contain over a thousand eggs. Males become mature at three years of age, but females do not begin to breed until they reach their fourth or fifth year. After reaching maturity, males shed their skin twice a year, whereas females slough their skin once a year just before egg-laying. They hibernate from October to March, often communally, under tree roots, in old rabbit burrows, or in piles of manure. Grass Snakes can live for up to 15 years.





The Croft Medical Centre Eastergate

Site location

- site boundary
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - none present within area shown
- Local Nature Reserve (LNR) - none present within area shown
- Ancient & semi-natural woodland
- Ancient replanted woodland

Figure 1.1

Map Scale @ A4: 1:25,000

Surveyed by: RJH
Survey date: n/a
Drawn by: RJH
Checked by: DP
Status: Final





The Croft Medical Centre Eastergate

Application site boundary and land ownership

 application site boundary

 land ownership boundary

Figure 1.2

Map Scale @ A4: 1:2,000

Surveyed by: RJH

Survey date: n/a

Drawn by: RJH

Checked by: DP

Status: Final



2 Survey Approach & Findings

Survey Approach

- 2.1 A seven-visit reptile presence/absence survey was completed in line with guidelines provided by the Herpetofauna Groups of Britain and Ireland³ (HGBI), as per the current recommendation provided on the Natural England website, as well as advice provided in the more recent Advice Sheet produced by Froglife⁴.
- 2.1 The optimal months for reptile survey are April, May and September and during these months the recommended times to check artificial refuges are from 8.30 am to 11.00 am in the morning, and from 4.00 pm to 6.30 pm in the evening, to avoid the heat of the midday sun. Note that checking at other times is acceptable providing weather conditions are suitable. Survey should also ideally take place when the air temperature is between 9°C and 18°C. However, changes in weather type can also influence the results, with the likelihood of seeing reptiles increasing, for example, on hot days following a cooler spell; or in showery weather conditions following a prolonged dry spell.
- 2.2 In terms of the current survey, 60 artificial reptile refuges (roofing felt) measuring 0.5 m² were installed in areas of suitable reptile habitat across the site on 1 July 2016, at a density of over 100 refuges per hectare.
- 2.3 The refuges were left in situ for 11 days to allow any reptiles present sufficient time to locate them prior to the first survey visit, which took place on 12 July 2016.
- 2.4 The time, air temperature, cloud cover and weather conditions were recorded for each visit. All refugia were then checked for reptiles basking on or sheltering underneath them and the number, age category, species and location of any reptiles found was recorded.
- 2.5 The remaining six survey visits were completed on the 15 and 26 July, and the 1, 2, 8 and 10 August 2016 in weather conditions that were suitable for reptiles to be active and using the refugia for shelter and thermoregulation.

Survey Findings

- 2.6 The results of the reptile survey are summarised in **Table 2.1**, which confirms that no reptiles were recorded during the survey, and that reptiles are not currently present within the site.

³ Herpetofauna Groups of Britain and Ireland (1998). *Evaluating local mitigation/translocation programmes: Maintaining best practice and lawful standards*. HGBI advisory notes for Amphibian and Reptile Groups (ARGs). HGBI, c/o Froglife, Halesworth. Unpubl.

⁴ Froglife (1999) *Reptile survey: an introduction to planning, conducting and interpreting surveys for snake and lizard conservation*. Froglife Advice Sheet 10. Froglife, Halesworth.



Table 2.1: Reptile survey findings.

Date in 2016	Time	Weather	Results
12 July	10:20	15C, slight breeze, 50% cloud cover	No reptiles seen
15 July	07:30	15C, slight breeze, 30 % cc	No reptiles seen
26 July	09:00	17C, calm, 30% cc	No reptiles seen
1 August	14:40	15C, slight breeze, 70%cc	No reptiles seen
2 August	10:20	17C, slight breeze, 50% cc	No reptiles seen
8 August	9:00	17C, calm, 10% cc	No reptiles seen
10 August	14:00	17C, calm, 80% cc	No reptiles seen



3 Conclusions & Recommendations

- 3.1 A comprehensive reptile survey of the application site and the adjoining northern land area has confirmed that reptiles are absent from the site, and therefore site clearance can be completed without restriction in relation to reptiles.
- 3.2 Other recommendations required to protect the site's existing ecology provided in the ecology report (AEL, July 2016) are however still relevant and must be implemented, as follows:
- All dense ground vegetation (e.g. dense grass and bramble / woody scrub) should be cleared outside of the bird nesting period (which should be considered to be March to August inclusive), or following confirmation by an ecologist that habitats to be cleared are free of breeding birds.
 - Efforts should be made to ensure that site clearance operations, particularly the clearance of dense vegetation should be undertaken in such a manner as to avoid accidental killing and injury of hedgehogs that might be sheltering within the Site. All dense ground vegetation should be cleared by hand outside of the bird nesting period (as described above) and the ground checked by an ecologist to ensure that it is free of hedgehogs before machinery is allowed to break the ground surface. Any hedgehog that is found should be relocated to a safe sheltered part of the northern land area. All cut vegetation should be chipped on site or, preferably, removed from site and not stored in heaps that could prove attractive to hedgehogs for shelter unless the intention is to leave them as permanent habitat piles for wildlife.





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