



Grass snake

HABITAT AND PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEYS AT A SITE IN ESSEX PROMOTED FOR MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT



Common spotted orchid

Laying reptile refugia

## PROJECT

Habitat and protected species surveys at a site in Essex promoted for mixed-use development

## DATE OF INSTRUCTION

June 2012

## LOCATION

Essex, UK

## CLIENT

Private developer

## BRIEF

In June 2012 we carried out an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey at a site in Essex being promoted for mixed-use, residential-led development. The site was a mixture of semi-improved grassland, pasture and arable land bordered by woodland and tree lines. There were two ponds within the site and a further three within 500m. The habitats on site and adjacent were considered to be favourable for a number of rare or protected species, including bats, badgers, dormice, great crested newts, nesting birds and reptiles.

## APPROACH

The range of impacts to these species would vary depending on the site layout as well as exact methods and timings of construction. We advised our client that potential impacts to reptiles and great crested newts could be more difficult to overcome because of the extent of suitable habitat on site. An early understanding of whether the species were present, and in what numbers, would enable development designs to respond accordingly, and improve the chances of the proposal gaining support. Surveys for these species were carried out in spring 2013 using the following methods:

- All ponds within 500m of the site were surveyed for great crested newts using bottle trapping, torch light survey and egg searches of vegetation
- All suitable grassland habitats were surveyed for the presence or likely/absence of reptiles over seven visits using artificial and pre-existing refugia

## OUTCOME

No great crested newts were recorded in any of the surveyed ponds, although two of the ponds contained low numbers of smooth newts. The risk of harm to this species would thus be negligible and works could progress without the need for a Natural England licence. It was recommended that the ponds should be retained and recommendations were given on how they could be improved for great crested newts and other amphibians.

The reptile survey found that at least three species were using the site; common lizard, slow worm and grass snake. Due to the amount of habitat being lost and the potential for harm to reptiles during construction, it was suggested that a translocation be undertaken. This would involve trapping reptiles and moving them to an area of suitable habitat outside the site.



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