



Reptile Presence/Likely Absence Survey 2024

**Land at Bird in Eye Farm,
Framfield Road, TN22 5HA**

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LIABILITIES:

Whilst every effort has been made to guarantee the accuracy of this report, it should be noted that living animals and plants are capable of migration/establishing and whilst such species may not have been located during the survey duration, their presence may be found on a site at a later date.

The recommendations contained within this document are based on a reasonable timeframe between the completion of the survey and the commencement of any works. If there is any delay between the commencement of works that may conflict with timeframes laid out within this document, or have the potential to allow the ingress of protected species, a suitably qualified ecologist should be consulted.

It is the duty of care of the landowner/developer to act responsibly and comply with current environmental legislation if protected species are suspected or found prior to or during works.

1.0 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 The Ecology Partnership was commissioned by Croudace Homes to undertake an updated reptile presence/likely absence survey for the land at Bird in Eye Farm, Bird in Eye Hill, Framfield Road, Uckfield, TN22 5HA.
- 1.2 Previous surveys conducted by CSA Environmental in 2019 identified low numbers of common lizards and grass snake on the edges of the site. The habitats have not materially changed; however, an update reptile survey was recommended due to the time lapse since previous surveys.
- 1.3 This report presents the results of the reptile surveys on site, which aim specifically to provide a current understanding of the population of reptile species onsite.
- 1.4 This report comprises:
- Introduction, including the legislative and planning context (Section 1);
 - Assessment methodology (Section 2);
 - Results of reptile surveys (Section 3);
 - Discussion and recommendations (Section 4);
 - Conclusions (Section 5).

Site Context and Status

- 1.5 The site is c20.08 ha with the central grid reference TQ48402075. The site is located to the east of Uckfield town centre, south of the B2102. The site is largely managed grassland habitats with the associated Bird in Eye Farm buildings at the centre of the site. Ancient woodland is located to the south and west of the site. Further west is Uckfield, with new development around Uckfield Hospital. To the north, east and south, arable landscape is present in the form of fields, woodlands and hedgerows. The approximately red line boundary is shown in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Approximate location of the red line boundary and immediate surroundings.

Description of Proposed Development

- 1.6 The proposals are for an outline planning application for the erection of up to 190 dwellings, with associated works, parking, landscaping, publicly accessible open space and SANG provision, with access from the B2102. Proposed works are displayed in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Current illustrative proposals for the site.

Legislation

- 1.7 In the UK, there are six native reptile species. The four widespread species are adder (*Vipera berus*), grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*), common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) and slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*). The two rare species are smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*) and sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*).
- 1.8 The widespread reptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) against intentional killing and injuring and the sale of a wild reptile or any part of such animal. The rare reptiles also receive legal protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 against deliberate injury, killing, capture or disturbance of a rare reptile and damage or obstruction of any place used for shelter or protection.
- 1.9 All six reptile species are also listed as species of principal importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, which means local authorities have a legal duty to take their conservation into account.

2.0 Methodology

- 2.1 A terrestrial survey of the site for reptiles was carried out over seven survey visits between 21st August and 25th September 2024. Prior to the commencement of the survey, the site was set up with artificial refugia (roofing felt) for reptiles on 7th August 2024, with a total of 80 mats placed in areas of suitable reptile habitat. The approximate mat locations are marked in yellow in Figure 3.
- 2.2 Reptile mats were placed within areas of suitable habitat, majority located in the margins of the grassland fields, either bordering hedgerow or woodland edge (Figure 3).
- 2.3 The mats were left in place for a bedding-in period of two weeks prior to the commencement of the reptile survey, meeting the required period as per standing advice from Natural England. The timing and number of surveys completed were based on guidelines produced by Froglife (1999) and Gent and Gibson (1998).

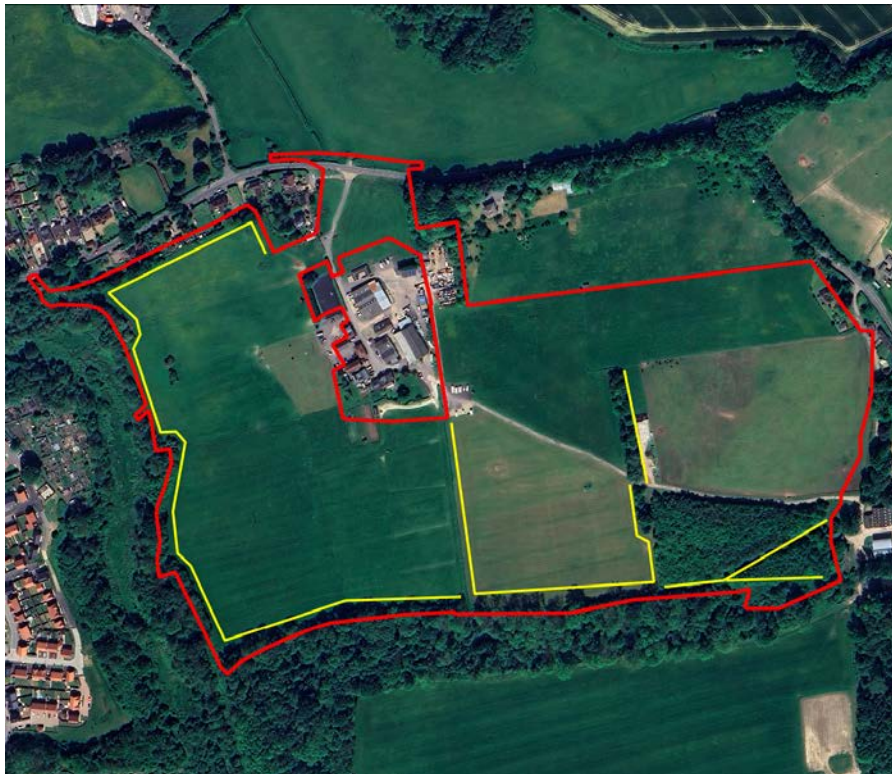


Figure 3: Approximate locations of the reptile mats during the survey (yellow lines) on site (red line).

- 2.4 A total of seven survey visits were carried out to check the refugia for the presence of reptiles. Visits were only carried out if the weather conditions were suitable for locating reptiles. Visits were carried out at a variety of times during the day to take any potential diurnal variation in activity into account. On each visit to the site, a minimum of one circuit to check all refugia was carried out.
- 2.5 In the event that reptiles were found on site, the size of the reptile population can be estimated using the Froglife (1999) scoring system. This assumes a density of 10 refugia per hectare of suitable reptile habitat. A population size class assessment, which is based on the number of adults recorded in one survey visit, can be made using Table 1.

Table 1: Population class assessment categories (Froglife 1999)

	Low Population	Good Population	Exceptional Population
Adder	<5	5-10	>10
Common lizard	<5	5-20	>20
Grass snake	<5	5-10	>10
Slow worm	<5	5-20	>20

3.0 Results

2019 Results

- 3.1 Seven presence/absence reptile surveys were undertaken by CSA Environmental between April and September 2019 across the proposed development area.
- 3.2 Two species of reptile, grass snake and common lizard, were recorded. This included a peak count of two adult grass snakes recorded on 12th July 2019, and one common lizard on 12th September 2019.
- 3.3 Reptiles were found close to the northern boundary of the site and along the central hedgerow.

2024 Results

- 3.4 Table 2 below documents the dates, weather conditions, and results of the reptile survey visits in 2024.

Table 2: Reptile survey results (2024)

Visit number	Date	Conditions	Results
1	21/08/2024	Temperature: 16°C Cloud cover: 2 Oktas Wind: 2 Beau Precipitation: None	1 juvenile grass snake
2	29/08/2024	Temperature: 16°C Cloud cover: 2 Oktas Wind: 3 Beau Precipitation: None	None
3	04/09/2024	Temperature: 17°C Cloud cover: 6 Okta Wind: 2 Beau Precipitation: None	2 juvenile grass snakes
4	09/09/2024	Temperature: 16°C Cloud cover: 7 Oktas Wind: 3 Beau Precipitation: None	1 adult female slowworm 1 juvenile grass snake
5	16/09/2024	Temperature: 17°C Cloud cover: 3 Oktas Wind: 2 Beau Precipitation: None	1 juvenile grass snake
6	20/09/2024	Temperature: 17°C Cloud cover: 8 Oktas Wind: 3 Beau Precipitation: None	None
7	25/09/2024	Temperature: 16°C Cloud cover: 8 Oktas Wind: 2 Beau Precipitation: Recent rain	None

3.5 Peak counts are taken from adult individuals present, with juveniles discounted from final counts. Therefore, the peak count was one slowworm on 9th September 2024. Although grass snakes were identified, no adult individuals were observed during the survey period.

3.6 According to the Froglife criteria, it is considered that the site supports a 'low' population of slow worm (Table 1).

3.7 As shown in Figure 4 below, the slowworm was found along the north-western boundary. The juvenile grass snakes were observed along the central hedgerow.

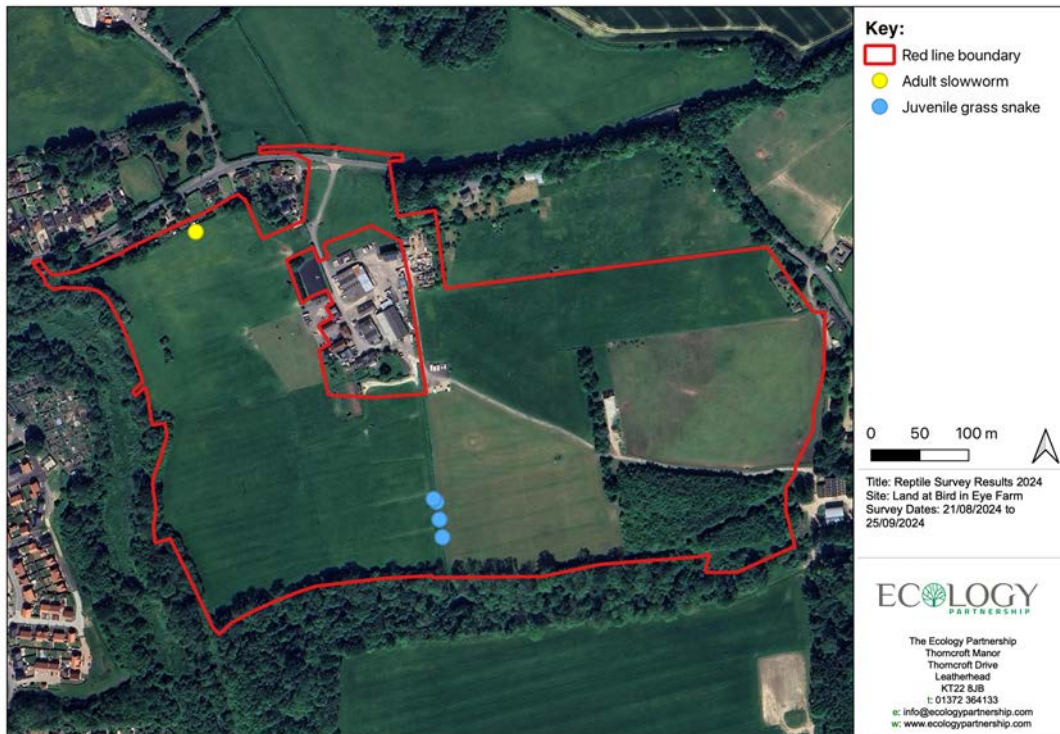


Figure 4: Spatial results across all surveys.

4.0 Discussion

- 4.1 A reptile presence/likely absence survey was undertaken within areas of suitable habitat within the red-line boundary of the site between April and September 2019 by CSA Environmental. Two species of reptile, grass snake and common lizard, were recorded with a peak count of two grass snakes and one common lizard. Most were found alongside the northern boundary of site with some identified along the central hedgerow.
- 4.2 Following 2019 surveys, the site was concluded to support low populations of common reptiles. The site had not materially changed but an update reptile survey was conducted over seven surveys from 21st August to 25th September 2024.
- 4.3 A peak count of one slowworm was found onsite. Although grass snakes were identified onsite, only juvenile individuals were observed throughout the 2024 survey period therefore is not able to be officially classified within the Froglife (1999) scoring system.
- 4.4 The size of the reptile population can be assessed using the Froglife (1999) scoring system. This system assumes a density of 10 refugia per hectare of suitable reptile habitat. 80 reptile

- mats were established equating to around 8ha. Although the site is comprised of c.20.08ha, the majority of the area consists of grazed and highly managed agricultural land therefore limiting reptile suitability. Therefore, it is considered that the survey effort is sufficient to support a mitigation strategy based on the data.
- 4.5 Two of the four widespread species of reptile were found on site: slow worm and grass snake. No evidence of any other reptile species such as common lizard, adder, smooth snake, or sand lizard was found on site. The slowworm was located towards the north-western boundary of site whereas the juvenile grass snakes were observed by the central hedgerow.
- 4.6 For a site to be classified as a 'key reptile site', the site must meet one of the following criteria outlined by Froglife (1999):
- Supports three or more reptile species.
 - Supports two snake species.
 - Supports an exceptional population of one species (Table 1)
 - Supports an assemblage of species scoring at least four (Table 1)
 - Does not satisfy the above but is of particular importance due to local rarity (e.g. in the East Midlands of England, adders are very rare so even "low" populations should be designated as Key Sites).
- 4.7 Evidence of a 'low' population of slow worms was found onsite in 2024, although only juvenile grass snakes were identified onsite it could be suggested that the site also supports a low population of grass snakes. Therefore, the site does not meet the criteria of a 'key reptile site'.
- 4.8 It is considered that there is plenty of space and opportunity to ensure reptiles are maintained within the site boundaries and can persist within the boundaries. The proposed works (Figure 2) maintains the majority of boundary features. Clearance of some suitable reptile habitat is expected although limited as majority of the works are expected on the unsuitable agricultural land, as such, it is deemed that reptiles onsite can be suitably protected from injury or mortality during works, by the enactment and following of a suitable system of Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs). This system of measures should include the following:

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- Prior to any works, heras fencing should be erected to protect retained hedgerow and treeline from works.
 - A toolbox talk should be given on site during the first day of vegetation clearance, regarding the legality surrounding reptiles, habitat requirement, basic identifying features and procedure if they are found.
 - All suitable refugia piles i.e., aggregate logs, building materials, etc existing onsite must be gently dismantled onsite under the direct supervision of an ecologist, any reptiles found must be gently caught and removed to an undisturbed area onsite.
 - All vegetation clearance should be conducted moving towards suitable retained habitat on and off site.
 - Due to the nature of the site, it is suggested that clearance be completed under direct ecological supervision.
 - Any suitable reptile habitat should be cleared in a staged cut, in suitable conditions (dry and above 8°C), across five days:
 - Day 1: Strim to 200mm
 - Day 2: No works to vegetation to allow for reptiles or other small animals to vacate site.
 - Day 3: Strim to ground.
 - Day 4: No works to vegetation to allow for reptiles or other small animals to vacate site.
 - Day 5: End of sensitive vegetation clearance process.
 - All significant materials generated by vegetation clearance should not be left on the ground. They should ideally be removed from site within 24 hours, but if this is not possible, then they should be stored within a skip or similar.
 - All building materials brought on to site should be stored, raised off the ground, to limit their availability as refugia piles.
 - All excavations should either be covered overnight or have an egress ramp placed within them, to prevent any reptiles or other small mammals from becoming trapped. Likewise, all fitted pipes should be blocked until the plumbing/drainage system is complete, to prevent any reptiles or small mammals/amphibians from becoming trapped.

Enhancement Strategy

- 4.9 Habitat piles should be installed within greenspaces for use as refugia by reptiles in any retained areas onsite. These could be log or stone piles (see Figure 4 below) and should be located in a variety of locations, including under shrub, areas of open space, within hedgerows, and woodland edges. Planting around habitat piles with such species as clematis or honeysuckle can also add value.



Figure 4: Examples of log piles that can be located at the edges of the site

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 A presence/likely absence survey for reptiles was undertaken within areas of suitable habitat on site between April and September 2019, and between 21st August to 29th September 2024.
- 5.2 The survey conducted in 2019 found a 'low' population of grass snake and common lizard. The updated survey in 2024 found a 'low' population of slowworm. This indicates that the site supports low populations of common reptile species. To ensure no reptiles are harmed by development, works should be conducted under a system of Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMs) laid out within this report.
- 5.3 General site enhancements have also been recommended to provide new opportunities for a range of wildlife post-development. Greenspaces within the development area should incorporate habitats and features making them suitable for reptiles and other wildlife, all to be managed in a way that will sustain their wildlife value.

6.0 References

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

Gent, T. & Gibson, S. eds. (1998) *Herpetofauna Workers Manual*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

Herpetofauna Groups of Britain and Ireland (1998) *Evaluating local mitigation/translocation programmes: maintaining best practice and lawful stanadards*. HGBI advisory notes for local reptile groups (ARGs).

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