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Reptile Survey Mersey Gateway Project

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INTRODUCTION

EVR Ecology was commissioned to carry out a reptile survey along the proposed Mersey Gateway route on both sides of the R Mersey which included Spike Island / Widnes Warth to the north and Wigg Island / Astmoor Industrial area to the south. The survey was carried out over the period August to September 2011.

The survey included an assessment of the habitat and placement of refuges (bitumen felt mats, 0.5m x 0.5m) at locations along and beside the intended Mersey Gateway route and in habitat or areas considered suitable for reptile species (Appendix - Fig 1 and 2).

Monitoring of these mats was carried out during the survey period along with checking under and around local natural features (hillocks, vegetation, logs) and human rubbish (plastic sheeting, tyres, canisters).

Refuges were placed in position either side of the Mersey over two days (2nd and 3rd August 2011) and revisited in suitable weather conditions on 8th August, 20th August, 31st August, 12th September and 19th September. Refuges were finally checked and withdrawn on 29th September 2011.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Mats were placed in areas considered suitable for reptiles along the proposed Mersey Gateway route on the following sites:

Spike Island – Public open space with areas of woodland, shrub and scrub bisected by the Sankey Canal.

Widnes Warth – Saltmarsh with some raised dry areas, hedgerow and scrub along its northern boundary and bisected north to south by a large drainage ditch.

Wigg Island – A public open space and Local Nature Reserve comprising wildflower meadows, woodland and scrub vegetation interspersed with footpaths and a disused section of the Runcorn Canal.

Astmoor Industrial Estate – A series of industrial and commercial units complete with pockets of grassland and scrub and a strip of woodland along the northern edge adjacent to the Ship Canal.

LEGISLATION

Reptiles and Amphibians

Reptiles (adder, grass snake, common lizard and slow worm) and amphibians (common frog, common toad, smooth newt, palmate newt)

Reptiles only (adder, grass snake, common lizard and slow worm) are protected via part of S 9(1) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) against:

- (a) *intentional* killing and injuring (note the provision in section 9(1) of Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 prohibiting “taking” does not apply to reptiles)

Both reptiles (adder, grass snake, common lizard and slow worm) and amphibians (common frog, common toad, smooth newt, palmate newt) are protected via part of S 9(5) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) against:

- (b) (i) selling, offering or exposing for sale, or having in possession or transporting for the purpose of sale, any live or dead wild animal or any part of, or anything derived from, such an animal; or
(ii) publishing or causing to be published any advertisement likely to be understood as conveying buying or selling, or intending to buy or sell, any of those things.

The legislation relates only to 'wild animals', but in any proceedings the animal in question shall be presumed to have been a wild animal unless the contrary is shown.

This protection is solely through the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended and defences and licensing provisions are provided within that Act.

The legislation & section numbers, and amendments:

Section 9 (4) a-c only of **The Wildlife & Countryside Act** as amended:-

- (i) Inclusion of common lizards, grass snakes, slow worms on Sch. 5 were inserted by article 2 of the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Variation of Schedules) Order 1988**, S.I.1988/288. http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1988/Uksi_19880288_en_1.htm
- (ii) Inclusion of Adder: article 2 of the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Variation of Schedules 5 and 8) Order 1991** S.I. 1991/361 http://www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si1991/Uksi_19910367_en_1.htm

RESULTS

No reptiles were recorded in any of the locations or the vicinity during the survey period.

Several toadlets and froglets were noted under refuges during checks.

PERSONNEL

Rob Smith is a professional consultant specializing in herpetological fauna with over 20 years' experience in surveying for both amphibians and reptiles. He is also an Associate Tutor for the Fields Studies Council in Herpetology.

REFERENCES

Reptile Habitat Management - Natural England / Amphibian and Reptile Conservation - Edgar, Foster and Baker

APPENDIX

Fig 1 – Refuge location on Mersey Gateway route (North)



Fig 2 – Refuge location on Mersey Gateway route (South)

