

## Slow Worms (legless lizards)



### Legal issues

Slow worms are protected under UK law: Schedule 9 (5) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), against any sale of any dead or living slow worm, or advertising any slow worm to be sold, or anything derived from a slow worm. They are also protected under the Protection of Animals 1991, and the Abandonment of Animals 1960.

### Licences ? – not licenceable

Procedures for the mitigation of Slow Worms on sites may be carried out without a Licence from Natural England or Defra (Natural England website, accessed 4 Sept 2007).

### Timing

Slow worms can be mitigated on site during March to October inclusive only since they are in hibernation the rest of the year. To be finished in October you need to be starting in late July - August. Suitable weather above 9°C is required for slow worms to be active.

### Assessment of population size

An assessment of the population size should be carried out, where possible, to determine whether the population might be low, medium or high. The size of the population can then inform the Method Statement.

### Where to put the slow worms?

Slow worms are best kept on site rather than being taken off-site. The best practice is to find a part of the site that will not be developed and to enclose this site off with plastic fence work. It should be able to support the slow worm population with rough grass cover and ample food (i.e. small invertebrates such as slugs). This will become the Receptor site. Where the slow worms will be removed from is called the Donor site. The integrity of the Receptor site must be maintained throughout the development of the site, and then the plastic fence can be removed so that the slow worms can be released back into the whole area.

### Mats, tins and visits

Carpet mats or tins are laid out on the ground. They should be put in place for about three weeks to bed in and to allow slow worms to find them. These warm up in the sun and slow worms seek these out to lie underneath. By checking these mats and tins regularly the slow worms can be removed in bags to the Receptor site. Site visits to check the mats varies according to the population size, for instance a low population requires 30 visits, a medium population 70 visits and a high population 90 visits.

### Destructive phase

It is acknowledged that finding slow worms by the above methods is only 95% efficient and that there is a small population of slow worms that will never come to the surface during these procedures. Therefore, after no more slow worms are found under mats on at least three visits (during suitable weather), a destructive phase is necessary to find these other individuals.

A small digger with a bucket with long tines is required to claw away at the grasses and debris to find these extra slow worms. This must be done carefully in the presence of an ecologist. This is sometimes a lengthy process but is an essential part of the finishing the mitigation work. After the site is declared free of slow worms, development can progress.

### Hibernacula

If the receptor site does not have suitable hibernation areas, then it is prudent to build underground hibernacula where slow worms can hibernate. These can be about 1.5m long by 1m wide, by 50cm deep. They are filled with broken bricks, logs etc. and topped with soil. They should be dug in a place that is well drained and will not flood. When finished they are not visible. The hibernacula can be constructed in a new landscaped area at any time all the slow worms have been transferred to the Receptor site.

### Monitoring

Monitoring is best practice to ensure the continued viability of the translocated animals. This needs to be done annually to check for any adverse environmental impact or encroaching plant succession with the provision of a management report where necessary. Monitoring should be funded annually in perpetuity.

### Bibliography

Gent, T. & Gibson, S. 1998. *Herpetofauna Workers' Manual*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Reading, C.J. *Evaluation of reptile survey methodologies: final report*. English Nature.