

Monitoring Translocated Slow-Worm Through Surveys

CHALLENGE

As preparation for the development of a proposed care home with residential apartments, Fed3 Projects needed comprehensive ecological survey work at a former police station.

SOLUTION

ECOSA produced a Reptile Monitoring and Management Plan, which set out sensitive habitat management techniques to be carried out at the receptor site. Additional refuge opportunities for slow-worm were also created at the receptor site in the form of two reptile hibernacula, which were created to support the population further.

RESULT

One year following the slow-worm translocation, these monitoring surveys recorded a peak count of 23 adult slow-worm within the receptor site. The monitoring will continue for three more survey seasons and will provide a valuable insight into the long-term impacts to translocated slow-worm.

CHALLENGE

As preparation for the development of a proposed care home with residential apartments, Fed3 Projects needed comprehensive ecological survey work to be undertaken at a former police station. ECOSA, a Trinity Consultants team, was appointed to undertake a reptile survey at the site in 2019 as per the best practice guidelines for the species group.

The site was surveyed using 30 reptile refugia placed across the site, throughout the scattered scrub, unmanaged grassland and woodland around the old police station buildings as per the best practice guidelines. The results from the reptile survey recorded a peak count of 22 adult slow-worm present within the grassland at the site, indicating a low population of the species.

Slow-worm are legless lizards which feed on a diet of invertebrates. They are long-lived, living up to 30 years in the wild. Slow-worm are one of the four reptile species that are native to Britain and are listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This affords them protection under Section 9 of this Act, making it an offence to intentionally kill or injure them. As the site was situated in an urban setting, with no nearby reptile habitat available, a reptile translocation was required in order for the development plans to progress.

SOLUTION

A suitable receptor site was identified to receive the translocated slow-worms. The receptor site previously supported a low population of slow-worm, prior to it being cleared and enhanced for wildlife as part of a separate scheme, therefore it was likely that slow-worm had not recolonised the receptor area to its full carrying capacity. With only a low population of slow-worm likely to be occupying the high-quality receptor site habitat, it was an ideal location for slow-worm to expand their range. The receptor site comprised a large wildflower meadow connected to woodland, a large lake, scrub and grassland in the wider surrounds.

As part of the engagement, ECOSA produced a Reptile Monitoring and Management Plan, which set out sensitive habitat management techniques to be carried out at the receptor site. Additional refuge opportunities for slow-worm were also created at the receptor site in the form of two reptile hibernacula, which were created to support the population further. ECOSA designed prescriptive management techniques in order to safeguard the slow-worm population in the long-term and not just during the translocation period.

Before the translocation exercise began, reptile exclusion fencing was installed at the site to assist in capturing slow-worm. Across the 57-day translocation period, an astonishing 155 individuals were captured from the site and released within the receptor site until the site was cleared of reptiles. Next was development of the care home.

RESULT

Reptile monitoring surveys at the receptor site were a requirement made by the local planning authority, which would provide important evidence highlighting the long-term impact to translocated slow-worm. One year following the slow-worm translocation, these monitoring surveys recorded a peak count of 23 adult slow-worm within the receptor site. The following year (two years after the translocation), ECOSA recorded a peak count of 24 adult slow-worm within receptor site. Given that the status of slow-worm at the receptor site remained consistent with previous known slow worm population data here, the species is thought to have colonised the receptor site successfully. Evidence of breeding slow-worm in the form of observed juveniles is also a good sign that the population is thriving in the high-quality habitat.

The monitoring will continue for three more survey seasons and will provide a valuable insight into the long-term impacts to translocated slow-worm. Should the population at the receptor site begin to decline, ECOSA will review the Reptile Monitoring and Management Plan in place and take positive action to support the population's recovery.

ABOUT TRINITY CONSULTANTS

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