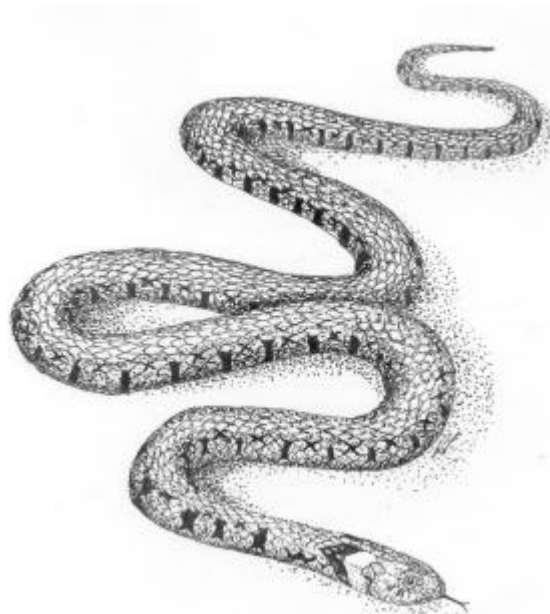


## GRASS SNAKE *NATRIX NATRIX* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The grass snake is a UKBAP species of conservation concern<sup>39</sup> and is one that has undoubtedly suffered large population losses over the last 30 years. The presence of grass snakes is an indication of the health of a habitat, and it is an ideal species to encourage younger generations to participate in pond reclamation and management projects.

Relevant Legislation/Species Status	
priority (P) or species of conservation concern (S) (1998)	S
EC Habitats Directive	-
Conservation Regs 1994	-
Berne Convention (1982)	-
Bonn Convention (1979)	-
CITES 1975	-
WCA (1981)	Sch. 5



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### 2. CURRENT STATUS

#### 2.1 UK and Wales

Grass snakes are the most nervous of the British reptiles, often basking partially covered by vegetation. Along with their cryptic coloration, this can make them difficult to see.

The young are found in September, often basking near to, or on the vegetation pile from which they emerged. Grass snakes bask at higher temperatures than other British reptiles (between 12°C and 20°C). The grass snake is found throughout mainland England and Wales, although it is virtually absent from Scotland, and is not found in Ireland. It is likely that this distribution is determined by climate, as the grass snake is much less cold tolerant than the adder. Within Wales the species is widespread, but restricted to suitable habitats.

#### 2.2 Caerphilly County Borough

The grass snake is found throughout the county borough but is certainly suffering a decline in population. There are a number of sites where they have disappeared within the last decade, although the causes are not always apparent. There has been no systematic survey of the grass snake in the county borough.

#### 2.3 Links with habitats

The grass snake, due to its restricted diet, is only found in association with wetland or flowing water habitats. The health of these habitats, especially the fish and amphibian populations within, is crucial to the grass snake. Any Habitat Statement/Action Plan concerning water or wetlands should be read in conjunction with this species action plan.

- **Wetlands**
- *Species-rich Grasslands* (Rhos pasture)
- *Common Land*
- *Post-Industrial Land*

**3. CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE SPECIES**

- Loss of habitat to pollution, development or natural succession
- Loss of prey species (see Amphibians SAP)
- Loss of suitable egg-laying sites
- Unintentional disturbance of egg sites, for example in compost heaps.
- Persecution

**4. CURRENT ACTION**

- 4.1 Management and creation of new wetlands will have benefitted the grass snake, although little has been done to specifically benefit the grass snake.
- 4.2 Rescue Programmes: sometimes the only option after disturbance to breeding sites is to hatch the eggs artificially, dramatically reducing the mortality rate, and providing healthy well-nourished juveniles for restocking wild populations or new sites. A number of captive bred individuals were released into a purpose built habitat in the grounds of Parc Cwm Darran in the late 1980s. No accurate monitoring has been done but the species is still present on that site.

**5. OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**

**5.1 UK Objectives and Targets**

Not applicable to this species.

**5.2 Caerphilly Objectives and Targets**

- 5.2.1 Halt the decline in grass snake populations. (Target: 2005)
- 5.2.2 Identify present locations of colonies through local knowledge, historical evidence and surveys, and maintain and improve these sites. (Target: 2003)
- 5.2.3 Monitor present sites to identify possible local threats to the population in the county borough. (Target: ongoing)

**6. ACTION AND KEY PARTNERS**

Action	Key Partners		Year to be complete or in place by:								
	Lead	Partners	2003	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>6.1 Policy and Legislation</b>											
6.1.1 Seek to designate sites with three or more species of breeding reptiles as SIN C.	CCBC	-									✓

Action	Key Partners		Year to be complete or in place by:								
	Lead	Partners	2003	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>6.2 Site Safeguard and Management</b>											
6.2.1 In conjunction with habitat action plans for wetlands, ensure sites are protected from pollution, development, natural succession etc.	CCBC	EA KWT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.2.2 Take any opportunities that arise to create new grass snake habitat e.g. school grounds, pond creation.	CCBC	Gwk KWT Schools		✓			✓			✓	
<b>6.3 Species Management and Protection</b>											
6.3.1 Encourage, through active management, the natural colonisation of new habitats, for example, using displaced specimens, or captive bred individuals from rescue programs.	CCBC	GWT GLWT	✓						✓		
6.3.2 Continue rescue programmes for disturbed breeding grass snake eggs and provide a relocation service for any individuals or populations that are threatened by unavoidable development or persecution.	CBP	(CCBC GWT GLWT CMCS)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.3.3 Continue to implement wildlife legislation.	Gwent Police	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>6.4 Advisory</b>											
6.4.1 Provide advice to landowners etc. on the importance of fresh water habitats and their surroundings to grass snake survival.	CBP	(KWT EA CMCS)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.4.2 Provide reassurance, information and advice to persons living in the vicinity of grass snake colonies.	CBP	(CMCS)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>6.5 Future Research and Monitoring</b>											
6.5.1 Set up county database for reptiles.	CCBC	-		✓							
6.5.2 Carry out surveys to ascertain sites and population sizes, and input data into the county borough database.	CBP	CMCS	✓			✓			✓		
<b>6.6 Communications and Publicity</b>											
6.6.1 Promote reptile conservation and improve public image through events and activities.	CBP	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.6.2 Liaise with local wildlife groups to encourage reptile awareness.	CBP	local community / wildlife groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓