Llanwern Rail Facilities - Phase 1 Planning
Reptile Survey Report
September 2018

Transport for Wales (TfW)
367590-WTD-CAR-2617
Llanwern Rail Facilities - Phase 1 Planning
Reptile Survey Report
September 2018
## Issue and Revision Record

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Checker</th>
<th>Approver</th>
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<td>A Bone</td>
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<td>E C Probert</td>
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Executive summary

Mott MacDonald (MM) has been commissioned by Transport for Wales (TfW), on behalf of Welsh Government, to prepare and submit a planning application, seeking full planning permission for the design and construction of a 1.6km long Major Events Stabling Line (MESL) on land adjacent to the existing Tata Steelworks Service Lines in Llanwern, South Wales known as Phase 1. The Site lies within the City of Newport and is located at Ordnance Survey Grid Reference ST 36907 87302.

The ecological survey work for this report has been undertaken in respect of the entire woodland (including the site and surrounds), this is shown by the dotted black line as detailed in Appendix A. The survey area was selected prior to the finalisation of Phase 1 of the Llanwern Rail Facilities Programme and is considered to provide important ecology context to the site-specific results. Phase 1 of the planning application is indicated by the red line boundary and is hereafter referred to as the ‘site’.

Mott MacDonald has undertaken reptile surveys to identify and assess presence/likely absence of the species. The purpose of this report is to document the findings of the presence/likely absence surveys for reptiles within all suitable habitat on within the survey area, to facilitate the development of the Scheme. This report presents the results of these findings.

A review of biological records and previous surveys undertaken in the area to support the M4 Corridor Around Newport Development, indicate that grass snakes are present in close proximity to the survey area.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) was undertaken (Ref: 367590-WTD-CAR-2604, Mott MacDonald, 2018) which concluded that there is habitat within the survey area suitable to support common reptile species such as woodland, scrub, tall ruderal, ephemeral/short perennial habitat and ballast. The survey area also contains suitable hibernacula features such as railway sleepers, earth banks and various holes/burrows for reptiles.

Seven presence/likely absence surveys were undertaken between 4 September and 3 October 2017. Grass snakes and slow-worms were recorded within the survey area. It is considered that grass snake and slow-worm populations within the survey area are breeding, as sub-adults and juveniles were recorded.

Based on the survey effort and records, a broad estimate of the population has been undertaken following standard guidance on reptile populations using adult peak counts (Froglife, 1999). Grass snakes were assigned as having a ‘low population class’ and slow worms were assigned as having a ‘good population class’.

According to the Guidelines for the Selection of Wildlife Sites in South Wales (Gwent Wildlife Trust, 2004), any site supporting a good population of any reptile species should be considered for selection of a wildlife site (i.e. Site of Importance for Nature Conservation). This guidance also states that recording several individuals of a species on half or more of the survey occasional should be taken to indicate the presence of a ‘good’ population. Recording of several individuals on every survey occasion (or nearly every occasion) may be indicative of an exceptional population. As life stage (e.g. adult or juvenile) is not accounted for in this guidance, following a precautionary approach, the population estimate for grass snake may be elevated to ‘good’.
The assessment of impacts on reptiles from Phase 1 of the Llanwern Rail Facilities Programme is included in a separate Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) which sets out site specific recommendations (Mott MacDonald 2018, Report Reference: 367590-WTD-CAR-2648).
1 Introduction

1.1 Project Description
Mott MacDonald (MM) has been commissioned by Transport for Wales (TfW), on behalf of Welsh Government, to prepare and submit a planning application, seeking full planning permission for the design and construction of a 1.6km long Major Events Stabling Line (MESL) on land adjacent to the existing Tata Steelworks Service Lines in Llanwern, South Wales. This is Phase 1 of the Llanwern Rail Facilities Programme.

The MESL will be used for stabling of rolling stock for major events in the area, to enable flexibility for future train requirements, and proving of trains prior to use on the rail network. The MESL will be electrified in a future phase of work. This proposed 1.6km length of MESL to the west of Monks’ Ditch was formerly known as Option 6a.

The wider Llanwern Rail Facilities Programme will include an extension of the MESL by circa 2.4km east (to achieve a total length of circa 4km), electrification of the MESL, a new Llanwern railway station and passenger line (including Park & Ride and footbridge), and connections to the South Wales Main Line (Relief Lines). The further phases of the project will be the subject of a subsequent planning application.

The key parameters for the Scheme are listed below:
- Whole Site area is 3.1 hectares. This land is contained within the red line boundary shown on the Site Location Plan (Drawing number 367590-MMD-48-XX-DR-C-0001); and
- The Site length is approximately 1.6km long and 19m wide.

1.2 Scope of Works
The General Arrangement drawings (Drawing numbers 367590-MMD-48-XX-DR-C-0002 to 367590-MMD-48-XX-DR-C-0005) demonstrate the project scope which includes the design and construction of the following:
- A single track stabling line (MESL) circa 1.6km long;
- Associated earthworks and landscaping; and
- Drainage and other engineering works.

In order to obtain full planning permission for Phase 1, we have carried out the outline design and technical assessment of the above scope, as well as multiple assessments in terms of ecology, environment, heritage and archaeology.

1.3 Site Location
The proposed rail development Site is located approximately 8 miles east from the centre of Newport, South Wales (Figure 1.1).

The Site is aligned roughly west – east and bordered by the existing South Wales Mainline to the north and the Tata Steelworks to the south. Along the southern boundary of the steelworks site runs the A4810 which links the M4 from junction 23A at Magor with the A48 at Liswerry (a predominantly residential suburb on the south-eastern side of Newport. The Site is more widely bordered by the M4 which runs approximately two and a half miles to the north and the Severn.
Estuary which lays approximately three miles to the south. The Gwent Levels to the south is a significant area of wetlands.

The existing South Wales Mainline passes north of the proposed site and provides opportunity for transport links for both passengers and freight.

**Figure 1.1: Proposed Location Plan**

The ecological survey work for this report has been undertaken in respect of the entire woodland (including the site and surrounds), this is shown by the dotted black line as detailed in Appendix A. The survey area was selected prior to the finalisation of Phase 1 of the Llanwern Rail Facilities Programme and is considered to provide important ecology context to the site-specific results. Phase 1 of the planning application is indicated by the red line boundary and is hereafter referred to as the ‘site’.

### 1.4 Previous Survey Work

The Preliminary Ecological Assessment Report (PEAR) (Ref: 367590-WTD-CAR-2604, Mott MacDonald, 2018) identified large areas of habitat within the survey area deemed as being suitable for reptiles. The survey area is dominated by woodland with reens running throughout. Scrub habitats line the edge of the woodland with ephemeral/short perennial habitats running adjacent to the railway ballast. The woodland, tall ruderal and scrub habitats are suitable to support reptiles with the reens also providing habitat for grass snakes (*Natrix natrix*).

### 1.5 Scope of this Report

The objectives of the report are as follows:

- To present the results of the desk study and field surveys;
- Evaluate the conservation status of the reptile population using the survey area and the importance of the survey area for reptiles;
- To identify potential constraints that could be posed by reptiles to any future development; and
• To provide high level recommendations for further survey work and/or mitigation and licensing requirements.
2 Methodology

2.1 Desk Study

A desk study was undertaken and reported within the PEAR (Mott MacDonald, 2018) to collate any reptile data within 2.0km of the survey area. Only records less than 10 years old were considered valid and relevant. Desk studies were undertaken according to the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) for Reptiles (HA 116/05).

The following sources were reviewed/consulted:

- South East Wales Biodiversity Record Centre (SEWBReC) (2017);
- Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC); and
- Welsh Government Online Environmental Information – M4 Corridor around Newport.

2.1.1 Limitations

Biological records obtained from third parties and presented in this desk study do not represent a full and complete species list for the area. They are mostly provided by individuals on an ad-hoc basis, meaning while they give a good representation there may be errors or deficiencies in the data.

2.2 Presence/Likely Absence Survey

All surveys were undertaken between September and October 2017 and were carried out using standard methodologies as recommended in the DMRB (HA 116/05) and Herpetofauna Workers Manual (2003). The methodology also incorporated the guidance set out in Froglife (1999) Advice Sheet 10.

A total of 300 artificial refugia, comprising of a mixture of bitumen roofing felt (~50 x 40 cm) and corrugated metal (~100 x 60 cm) were placed within selected areas of suitable habitat at a spacing of approximately 1 every 20m (which exceeds the standard guidance of at least 10 refugia per hectare). The artificial refugia were set out on the 22 and 23 August 2017. The artificial refugia were placed only in habitat considered suitable or optimal for reptiles. The refugia were numbered and mapped to ensure that none were missed during the subsequent surveys.

A total of seven surveys were undertaken between 4 September and 3 October 2017. Six survey visits were undertaken in September which is the optimum survey period for reptiles. The final survey visit was undertaken in early October and therefore within the suitable period for reptile surveys. All surveys were undertaken during suitable weather conditions for basking reptiles (generally when the air temperature was between 10-20°C and there was no heavy rain, see Table 2.1 for weather conditions). During each visit, a visual survey of the area and artificial refugia was carried out with any naturally basking reptiles noted before the artificial refugia was surveyed for any reptiles sheltering underneath.
Table 2.1: Summary of the Weather Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visit</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Weather</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>04-05/09/17</td>
<td>Overcast, drizzle, 17°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14/09/17</td>
<td>Sunny, Dry, 13°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>18/09/17</td>
<td>Overcast, Intermittent drizzle, 13°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22/09/17</td>
<td>Sunny, Dry, 14°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>27/09/17</td>
<td>Overcast, Dry, 16°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>29/09/2017</td>
<td>Overcast, intermittent rain showers, 16°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>02-03/10/17</td>
<td>Overcast, Dry, 15°C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During each survey the species, number of individuals, age class, refuge number and, where possible, sex was recorded.

The peak count of each species obtained by a survey under suitable survey conditions within one day was used to estimate the reptile population size. The scoring methodology set out in Froglife (1999) Advice Sheet 10 was used (Table 2.2).

In order to assess the importance of the survey area for reptiles, the survey area was assigned a total ‘assemblage’ score dependant on the relative size of reptile population scores of all species present within the survey area.

This precautionary approach has been developed because of the complex relationship between numbers of animals detected during surveys and the actual population size. The seven visits were undertaken for presence/likely absence; however, it is considered that a broad estimate of population size can be undertaken from these results.

Table 2.2: Criteria for Estimating Population Size and Assessing the Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Low Population Score 1</th>
<th>Good Population Score 2</th>
<th>Exceptional Population Score 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adder</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>5 - 10</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass Snake</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>5 - 10</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Lizard</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>5 - 20</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow-Worm</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>5 - 20</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Froglife: 1999

The location of the individual reptiles was mapped to understand the distribution of reptiles across the survey area, see Appendix B.

2.3 Personnel

The presence/likely absence surveys were undertaken by the following surveyors:

- Gareth Starr BSc (Hons);
- Chelsea Edwards BSc (Hons) MSc;
- Zoe Costas Michael BSc (Hons) MSc MCIEEM;
- Lorraine Woolley MA (Oxon) MRes MCIEEM; and
- Tom Ruff BSc (Hons).
2.4 Survey Limitations

Reptile activity follows seasonal patterns and changes over the course of the year as well as from year to year (being partially dependant on migration to/from neighbouring sites). Reptile species such as snakes are known to migrate between suitable habitat features especially between summer and winter.

It is not possible to provide an accurate population size without undertaking detailed capture, mark and release surveys which require a substantial effort. However, it is possible to provide an indication of the relative population sizes by using the peak counts, as detailed in Table 2.2.
3 Legislation and Ecology

3.1 Legislation
The four common reptile species, adder (*Vipera berus*), grass snake (*Natrix natrix*), common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) and slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*), are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended) against deliberate and/or intentional killing, injuring and trade.

3.2 Ecology
Generally, reptiles are active during the day from March to early October. They hibernate through the winter season from October to March, and mating takes place between April and July with young born between June and October (Edgar *et al.*, 2010). Reptiles are ectothermic which means they rely on the external environment to maintain their body temperatures. As such, they have variable body temperatures and it influences many aspects of reptilian biology, including habitat requirements (Edgar *et al.*, 2010). They are usually active when temperatures are above 10°C, when there is no precipitation or just after a rain shower and if the wind strength is negligible to moderate. They will usually move into colder microclimates if temperatures exceed 20°C and will find shelter if there is precipitation and/or if the wind strength is too high (Froglife, 1999).

All six species of British reptile have been identified as being of conservation concern due to the decline in the amount of suitable habitat. Identification of the four common British reptiles, their habitat requirements and activity details including their dispersal distances are detailed below.

Sand lizards and smooth snakes have been discounted due to lack of suitable habitat within the location and distance from known populations (Edgar *et al.*, 2010) and are no longer considered in this report.

3.2.1 Common Lizards
Common lizards typically grow up to 13cm long and are various shades of brown with small bars or spots. Young lizards are black or dark copper in colour.

They can be found in a range of different habitats, including grassland, woodland edges, brownfield sites, heaths and dunes and are often seen on linear features including railway embankments and stone walls (English Nature, 2004).

They are diurnal and travel only up to a few tens of metres, as lizards often share the same basking areas and hiding places. Most dispersal is through the movements of juveniles, which can rapidly colonise new habitat (Edgar *et al.*, 2010).

3.2.2 Slow-worms
Slow-worms are lizards, but have a snake-like appearance, as they have no legs and are clad in smooth shiny scales and typically grow up to 400mm in length. Males are various shades of grey or brown with occasional blue spots; females are brown or copper in colour with dark brown flanks and a dark vertebral stripe. Young slow-worms are light silver or gold in colour with darker more defined flanks and vertebral stripe.

They can be found on heathland, lower altitude moorland, most types of grassland (especially chalk grassland and rough grassland with bramble scrub), woodland glades and rides,
hedgerows and disused quarries (Edgar et al., 2010). They can also be found on embankments including railway, road and canal (Edgar et al., 2010).

Slow-worms are mainly diurnal but can forage after dark on warm evenings. They primarily live underground, underneath objects, within vegetation litter and grassland tussocks. They do not move long distances and territories are likely to only extend to several hundred square metres. They hibernate in communities and often undertake annual migration movements but the distances are smaller compared to snake migration distances (Edgar et al., 2010).

3.2.3 Adders
Adders can grow up to 550mm long and are usually grey, rust or sandy-coloured, with a dark coloured zig-zag stripe all the way along their body.

They can be found on heaths, moors, meadows, woodland glades and urban fringe sites.

Adders are mainly a diurnal species but may also be active at night during very hot weather. They often use separate spring breeding and summer foraging areas as they prefer wetter habitats for the summer, which can be up-to 2.0km apart. They return to traditional hibernation sites in late summer which are often where the females give birth (Edgar et al., 2010).

3.2.4 Grass Snakes
Grass snakes are usually between 700mm and 1,000mm long with an olive green, brown or grey body, with black bars down the sides. They characteristically have a yellow or white “collar” behind the head.

Grass snakes are associated with wetlands, but can also be found in heathland, grasslands, open woodlands, farmland, gardens and allotments. They can also be found on brownfield sites including railway corridors, disused quarries, along road and canal corridors. Grass snakes are often not reliant on a single site providing the necessary habitat for hibernation, feeding and egg-laying. Warm, humid, decomposing organic material is required for egg-laying.

Grass snakes are largely diurnal although they are known to be active at night during warm periods, especially in and around ponds. Individuals disperse from hibernation sites relatively rapidly and may move over several kilometres during the active season. They may migrate through relatively poor-quality habitat to reach favoured egg-laying, foraging or hibernation areas (Edgar et al., 2010).
4 Results

4.1 Desk Study

4.1.1 SEWBRéC Records
Two records of reptiles were identified within 2.0km of the survey boundary. These included: one record of two individual grass snakes submitted in 2016 approximately 1.2km away from the survey area and one record of a common lizard approximately 1.7km away from the survey area.

4.1.2 M4 Corridor around Newport Data
A review of the M4 Corridor around Newport data has identified the presence of both adult and juvenile grass snakes to the south of the survey area.

4.2 Presence/Likely Absence Survey

The surveys confirmed the presence of slow-worm and grass snake within the suitable habitat within the survey area.

The following table provides a summary of the results of the surveys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1: Summary of survey results</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grass snake skin was recorded on this visit.
5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Interpretation and Conclusions

5.1.1 Presence/Likely Absence Surveys

Presence/likely absence surveys confirmed that slow-worms and grass snakes are using the survey area. A peak count of two adult grass snakes were recorded along with 10 adult slow-worms. Grass snakes were therefore originally assessed as having a ‘low population class’ and slow-worms as a ‘good population class’ according to Froglife (1999) Advice Sheet 10. It is considered that slow-worm and grass snake populations within the survey area are breeding as sub-adults and juveniles were recorded.

According to the Guidelines for the Selection of Wildlife Sites in South Wales (Gwent Wildlife Trust, 2004), any site supporting a good population of any reptile species should be considered for selection. This guidance also states that recording several individuals of a species on half or more of the survey occasions should be taken to indicate the presence of a ‘good’ population. Recording of several individuals on every survey occasion (or nearly every occasion) may be indicative of an exceptional population. As life stage (e.g. adult or juvenile) is not accounted for in this guidance, following a precautionary approach, the population estimate for grass snake may be elevated to ‘good’.

5.2 Assessment and Recommendations

The current proposals for the Scheme require some work within woodland and scrub habitats suitable for use by reptiles. The survey work has confirmed presence of slow-worms and grass snakes within the survey area.

The assessment of impacts on badgers from Phase 1 of Llanwern Rail Facilities Programme is included in a separate Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) which sets out site specific recommendations (Mott MacDonald 2018, Report Reference: 367590-WTD-CAR-2648). However, on the basis of the results of this report, the following general recommendations are relevant:

5.2.1 Avoidance

Vegetation clearance should be kept to a minimum and considered throughout the design process, where possible

5.2.2 Mitigation

The strategy for reptile mitigation will need to be agreed with the Newport County Ecologist. A mitigation strategy will need to be developed in parallel with the final design. Examples of mitigation measures are included below:

- Trapping and translocation exercise;
- Reduction of impacts through careful timing of works, sensitive working methodology and ecological supervision;
- Retention of optimal reptile habitat where possible;
- New habitat creation; and
- Enhancement of existing habitat.
6 References

Appendices

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C. Reptile Presence/Likely Absence Survey Results 22
A. Site Location Plan
B. Reptile Refugia Locations
Client: Transport for Wales
Southgate House
Wood Street
Cardiff, CF10 1EW
United Kingdom

Title: South Wales Metro - Task Order 026
Llanwern Station - Artificial Reptile Refugia Locations

Design: G Starr
Drawn: T Ruff
Coordination: G O’Donovan

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South Wales Metro - Task Order 026
Llanwern Station - Artificial Reptile Refugia Locations

Survey area

Artificial reptile refugia (indicative location)
South Wales Metro - Task Order 026
Llanwern Station - Artificial Reptile Refugia Locations

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Eng Check
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C. Reptile Presence/Likely Absence Survey Results