

Grass Snakes in Jersey

The grass snake is the rarest of Jersey's reptiles. It is often confused with the slow worm, which is actually a legless lizard. Both these animals are fully protected under the conservation of wildlife (Jersey) law 2000.

Little is known about the grass snake's ecology and habits — in particular the impact it has on potential prey species like the toad, newt and agile frog . Grass snakes are very secretive. A glimpse of them is nowadays becoming a rare privilege.

In this leaflet you will find tips on creating egg-laying sites for grass snakes and making your pond and its surroundings more attractive to them and other amphibians.

Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) Facts

- ◆ Entirely **HARMLESS**
- ◆ Often seen around ponds and streams (it is a good swimmer) but can also be found in dry woods, hedgerows and meadows.
- ◆ Diurnal (active during the day).
- ◆ Frequently visits gardens and farms.
- ◆ Adults about 80cm long (up to 120cm).
- ◆ Feeds mostly on amphibians (frogs, toads and newts).
- ◆ Grass snakes are not shiny, but are dull green/brown, with a cream belly and black markings
- ◆ Black spots and black bars are found down its sides.
- ◆ Yellow and black collar is distinctive, but occasionally absent, especially in larger individuals.
- ◆ Eggs are often found in compost heaps, manure piles and any other warm rotting vegetation.
- ◆ A good time to see them is after they emerge from hibernation in March-April, but they can be encountered until October.

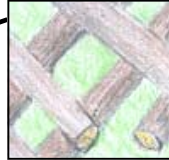


When grass snakes are threatened they can seek shelter underwater



How to encourage snakes to lay eggs in your garden?

1- Foundations: lay branches or logs in a criss-cross pattern. This will form the base for the topping. This allows ventilation to the heap and easy access for the snakes.



2- Making the incubator: Grass snake eggs need the warmth of decomposing vegetation. The most successful heaps are made of grass, cuttings, leaves, kitchen waste (peelings), manure, sawdust, etc. Mix in prunings to create air gaps and passageways for snakes. A sheet of corrugated iron or carpet on top may help to retain moisture.

3- Add more vegetation as the heap gradually rots down. If you use the compost for the garden, remove material only from April to mid-June or from mid-September to October to prevent disturbing incubating eggs and overwintering grass snakes or slow worms.

4- Wait for the snakes: it may take a while for them to discover the heap, but in the mean time other wildlife will benefit from it. Watch out for youngsters emerging in late August-September.

An example of good pond, for both grass snakes and amphibians:

Create a pond that could be used by amphibians, thus providing a foraging ground for the grass snakes.

The pond should:

- ◆ Have long grasses dipping into the water. The roots form thick mats among which invertebrates can hide
- ◆ Have some short grass to allow animals to approach the water's edge.
- ◆ Be sited where it gets maximum sunlight and least leaf litter.
- ◆ Be bordered by rocks and shrubs to provide cover (to hide and hibernate in).
- ◆ Have gently shelving sides, to provide easy access and exit and a partly marshy margin.
- ◆ You don't need to provide food for tadpoles - they feed on algae and other materials occurring naturally in your pond.



Distribution of Grass Snakes in Jersey

Dear Sir / Madam,

The Ecology Team of The States of Jersey Environment Division is currently studying the distribution of grass snakes in Jersey.

We are asking members of the Public with ponds in their gardens to contact us with any grass snake sightings that they may have. We would be extremely grateful if you could answer the brief questions on this document and return it.

Thank you very much for your assistance in this matter.

The Ecology Team

QUESTIONNAIRE:

Name:

Post code:

E-mail address:

Have you ever seen a grass snake on your property? Yes / No

Have you seen any this year? Yes / No

If yes, in what months?

Where have you seen them on your property?

How many have you seen this year? 1 2 3 4 5-9 10+ 20+

Have you ever seen a slow worm on your property? Yes / No

Have you seen any this year? Yes / No

If yes, in what months?

Where have you seen them on your property?

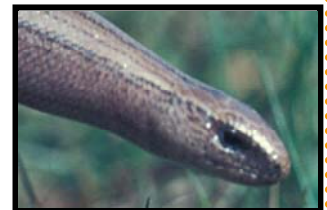
How many have you seen this year? 1 2 3 4 5-9 10+ 20+

Any further Comments:

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Grass Snake



For more information please contact the States of Jersey, Environment Division, Ecology Team on Tel: 441600 Fax: 441601.

Please return your comments to Environment Division in the envelope provided.
 Thank you