



THE NATIONAL TRUST

INFORMATION SHEET

MANAGING RISK – European Protected Species Smooth snake *Coronella austriaca*

Status and distribution

UK	Native, now Britain's rarest reptile (rare and localised). Confined almost exclusively to the heathlands of southern England in parts of Surrey, Dorset and Hampshire. Introduced to West Sussex. Protected Species under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and CroW Act 2000.
EU	Annex IV of the EC Habitats Directive, Appendix II of the Bern Convention.

The smooth snake was once found in Berkshire, Devon and Wiltshire. It has declined rapidly due to the massive losses of lowland heathland in the south of England.

The smooth snake is associated almost entirely with dry lowland heathland but has been known to use woodland margins, wet heath and bogs adjacent to heaths. It will use artificial reptile refuges in the shape of discarded or placed metal, wood, or plastic boards. However, this can make them more vulnerable to disturbance or collection. Sunny slopes, with a southerly aspect, and mature, structurally diverse vegetation (heather, gorse) are particularly attractive. Logs and other debris provide both shelter and basking. Good connectivity between other smooth snake sites is very important.

Presence within NT Properties

In the last decade, smooth snakes have been recorded from NT properties in Cheshire, Hampshire, Dorset and Surrey, (Cirencester Recorder Database, 2002).

Threats and risks

There is a chance of encountering known or unknown populations of smooth snakes whilst undertaking works on NT land, or lowland heathland sites in central southern England. Any works that may disturb smooth snakes must proceed under licence or with advice from EN.

Examples of works likely to affect smooth snakes and their habitat which may require safeguards such as licensing including:

- Fragmentation of habitat.
- Fires causing damage and degradation to habitat.

References and Further Information

DEFRA (2002). *European Protected Species Guidance Note. (WLF 11 (5/02).*

DEFRA, Bristol: www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/regulat/forms/cons_man/wlf11.htm

English Nature (1995) *Facts about reptiles* – leaflet, Peterborough.

Tony Gent and Steve Gibson (eds),(1998) *Herpetofauna Workers' Manual*, JNCC/EN, Peterborough.

smooth snake



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