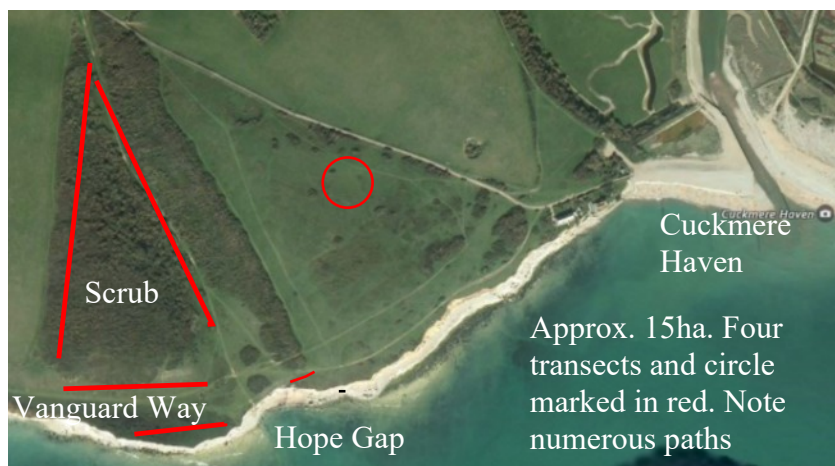


Seaford Head Local Nature Reserve Reptile Survey 2017

In 2017, 5 hectares of the nature reserve were surveyed. The survey area was a triangular area bounded by cliffs to the south and heading inland for 500m. The area is typical dry chalk grassland and the vegetation varies from short grassland to expanses of dense low scrub. A dry valley leading down to the sea bisects the extensive scrub area. There are several well used footpaths including the Vanguard Way, which means there is an almost continuous stream of walkers, runners and dogs using the area for recreation throughout the day and every day. Indeed the reserve is Seaford's dog owners favourite haunt. Such a busy site might seem anathema to diurnal reptiles which are generally considered to be easily disturbed animals, but there is a long history of adder sightings here.



Around 45 refuges were distributed in February mainly along 4 transects and 15 surveys were undertaken between February and October. The site proved to be challenging, not only because of the large amount of inquisitive human and dog traffic, but also the astonishing winds which on several occasions meant that a refuge disappeared or was found 100m or more from its place. Gradually we learned how to use slightly more sheltered spots, or resorted to weighting down.

Surveying began in late February in the hope of finding early emergers from hibernation. No luck. By the end of March there were still no sightings despite numerous adder reports along the south coast. Eventually there was a sighting, ignominiously not by us, but by an early morning birder who reported almost treading on an adder. However 1 April produced 3 adders one in each of the transects around the main scrub area. By the end of May we were up to 8 sightings and the cliff top transect was now producing 3 of them and a fourth in the outlying circle. Adder recording peaked in mid July with 12 animals found spread over the whole survey area, though seven still were close to the scrub edges suggesting the scrub remained a popular location to hang out. It was hoped that we would see a retreat from the outlying areas into the scrub over the autumn, but in fact sightings decreased rapidly after July.



<p>Reptile and Reptile Estate Agents</p> <p>Des Res for Adders Seaford Head</p> <p>Large area of impenetrable scrub allowing basking opportunities and no unwelcome visitors</p> <p>Fantastic coastal views of the renowned Seven Sisters</p> <p>Plentiful supply of old rabbit burrows for those colder evenings</p> <p>Lively local adder scene with likely mating opportunities.</p>

Common lizard were also seen regularly from February to October with peak numbers of 6 on three surveys, but all these sightings were close to the scrub suggesting that this was their preferred habitat.

Slow worm were found in small numbers and surprisingly grass snake, given the lack of water bodies, were seen occasionally. Then on 2 October the surveyors were pleased to find all 4 common reptile species in one survey.

The work has shown that Seaford Head has a thriving population of adders as well as small numbers of other reptiles. The numbers of adders suggests that they are not

much troubled by the flow of human traffic, which is probably greater than anywhere else on the South Downs save Ditchling Beacon. Indeed the adders found under refuges did not seem at all perturbed by their voyeurs, suggesting that they have successfully adjusted to high levels of disturbance. An enquiry at a local vets revealed that no dogs had been presented with adder bites during 2017.

For 2018 the plan is to continue monitoring, but on a reduced scale and to survey the western end of the reserve which backs onto housing and the golf course.

Finally thanks must go to the doughty Seaford Natural History Society members who carried out all the surveys with precision and great enthusiasm. Thanks also to Sarah Quantrill, the Sussex Wildlife Trust ranger who manages the reserve and allowed us to carry out the survey work. The Trust have recently contracted to manage the site for the next 25 years.

Chris Drewery SxARG