



Data Interpretation Guidelines

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Rationale:

This document aims to help the user to understand the value as well as the limitations of species data, and to maximise the benefits that can be drawn from them. It will be supplied with all data released by The HCT, and we recommend that it be used alongside data in any interpretative exercise carried out upon data that we supply. This approach is supported by English Nature, with whom we have developed these guidelines. Whilst we hope that the data we provide will be valuable for the purpose for which users request them, we wish to point out that certain caveats need to be borne in mind.

Metadata:

The HCT holds, in a variety of formats, rare species monitoring data stretching back up to 30 years. The HCT database is focussed on the rare species, but holds some widespread species data. Data entry is ongoing, and currently there is a large backlog of data still to be entered, therefore it is an incomplete resource and should be treated as such. The HCT holds natterjack toad data from 1970 onwards. Smooth snake and sand lizard data go back about 10 years in detail, and up to about 30 years in lesser detail. We collect species data annually as part of our monitoring activities, but we are developing the methodologies and procedures over time. We aim to expand our surveillance operations to meet requirements for defining and monitoring 'favourable conservation status' *sensu* the EC Habitats Directive, statutory 'common standards' monitoring of protected sites, supplying alert mapping and sensitivity mapping for development planning, decision-making, evaluating and guiding conservation activities, developing a National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS), carrying out scientific projects, and increasing public education and awareness.

The HCT rare species database currently comprises the following datasets:

- All rare species and exotic species data from the Biological Record Centre, CEH (up to 2003)
- The British Herpetological Society database (up to 1998)
- Summarised annual data from the *Natterjack Site Register 1970-1999*
- All rare species data for reintroduction sites in Wales
- All reptile data gathered by The HCT for England during 2002 and 2003, including widespread species
- National Trust data for Purbeck Estates for 2002
- Several EN contracted reptile surveys of Dorset sites
- All Poole Borough Council amphibian and reptile data up to 2002
- Various other datasets from independent herpetologists and organisations

Caveats to the use of data:

- The data we provide should not be viewed as complete or comprehensive
- The data do not represent systematic surveys except where specified
- The spatial, temporal and qualitative coverage of the data we hold is not consistent
- Some data sources have not been accessible to us, and those that we hold are not fully digitised, therefore our data are likely to have significant gaps in them
- Reptiles are cryptic animals whose presence and status are difficult to assess, therefore any data should be used with implicit caution
- Spatial gaps in records may represent a lack of survey, inconsistent effort, inappropriate survey conditions, variability in survey methods or observer bias
- The absence of evidence does not mean evidence of absence
- The data provided do not include records flagged as confidential by us or the recorder(s), but we will say when this is the case
- The older data are, the less useful they are as an up-to-date reflection of species status
- Data older than five years should be updated with a new survey
- Circumstances on a site may have changed since the last information was gathered, such as recent colonisation by species that weren't present previously
- Resolution of spatial information may be imperfect, or it may have been blurred for security reasons
- Further survey is nearly always necessary before a full up-to-date understanding of a site and its wildlife is possible

Constraints on the use of data:

- Information on rare and threatened species can be highly sensitive, therefore we take care when passing it on to others; furthermore there are copyright and data protection issues associated with many of the records we hold
- Data will only be supplied upon satisfactory completion of a *Data Request Application*
- Users may only use and retain data under the conditions stated in the respective *Data Release Statement*
- If you wish to amend any conditions, please contact us for written permission
- Users may not sell or pass on any data to others without our written agreement
- Users must respect all laws and necessary considerations regarding sensitivity, confidentiality, ownership, copyright and data protection.
- The HCT retains copyright on all intellectual property contained in the information, unless stated otherwise in the *Data Release Statement*
- The HCT asserts its moral rights and wishes to be acknowledged as the source of any data it provides
- We cannot be held responsible for any actions or consequences resulting from the use of data supplied by us
- Limits to the distribution and dissemination of information may be imposed in the respective *Data Release Statement*

These guidelines should not be viewed as exhaustive. A precautionary approach should be taken if you are unsure that the data fit the purpose for which you are using them. We encourage you to approach The HCT for further advice.