

Natural History Notes

NATRIX NATRIX (Grass snake): HABITAT. During site-based research undertaken at Ynyslas Nature Reserve on 25 May 2013, a single adult *N. natrix* was observed basking briefly. Approximately 1 m total length with a sizable girth, the body was a dark olive colour with a cream collar behind the head; bordered to the rear by black marks and numerous black bars on the flanks. Although it could not be confirmed, the size and girth would suggest that it was a gravid adult female (Beebee & Griffiths, 2000).

The location was a small south-east facing section of sand dune within the County of Ceredigion, Wales (SN60506 94095 +/- 3m); Fig. 1 shows a map of the location on the dune system with an image insert of the dune habitat. The aft or secondary dune ridge is located some 45 m from MHW, 1600 m from the nearest permanent fresh water body and a minimum of 840 m from the nearest identified potential egg-laying site; which is a manure heap.

Whilst it has already been demonstrated that *N. natrix* will utilise a range of habitats, they do not often seem to be seen on dune systems in the UK; although records are not un-common in continental Europe (Mark Barber, pers. comm.). With a small number of records for *N. natrix* supplied by rangers and members of the public at the site, this is the first outside of the grassland habitat within the interior of the site.

With *N. natrix* being an adaptable, highly

mobile species (Corbett, 1989; Beebee & Griffiths, 2000), as an opportunistic hunter it is known to prey on reptiles, mammals, hatchling birds and invertebrates (Brown, 1991), all of which are found in varying abundance across frontal dune systems, possibly explaining its presence within the area.

REFERENCES

- Beebee, T. & Griffiths, R. (2000). *Amphibians and Reptiles: A Natural History of the British Herpetofauna*. HarperCollins, London.
- Brown, P.R. (1991). *Ecology and vagility of the grass snake, Natrix natrix helvetica Lacepede*. PhD. Thesis. University of Southampton, UK.
- Corbett, K. (Ed.) (1989). *Conservation of European Reptiles and Amphibians*. Christopher Helm, Bromley.
- Source: "Ynyslas", Ceredigion, Wales lat 52.526802 and lon -4.055386. Google Earth. May 05, 2009. July 09, 2013.

Submitted by: STUART ANDREW GRAHAM, Bangor University, College Road, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL572DG. E-mail: stuartgrahamuk@hotmail.co.uk



Figure 1. Location map and image of the habitat in which *N. natrix* was observed basking (Google Earth, 2013).