

Should There Be Any Sand Lizards in the New Forest?

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In recent decades, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) and its predecessors have “reassembled” much of the sand lizard’s former UK range. This has been due to a series of nearly 70 successful re-introductions, plus work by many parties to improve and expand its heathland and sand dune habitats. As with any similar project, however, things have rarely been straightforward, with the New Forest being a particular challenge. Opinions on the desired conservation status of this species here range from ‘they should occupy every New Forest heath’ to ‘they aren’t even native to this area so shouldn’t be present at all’! This disparity in views has been complicated by a lack of knowledge about their historical range, the frequent misidentification of the abundant common lizard and a large number of unofficial sand lizard releases, often into unsuitable areas.

Paul Edgar has been working with Natural England and ARC to resolve some of these issues for the sand lizard in the New Forest and to propose, if possible, acceptable solutions. Paul also leads on ARC’s habitat management for the Species Survival Fund project, with the sand lizard being one of the target species. This talk summarises the history of sand lizard conservation here and looks at how this recent work will take it into the future. In particular, Paul describes how ARC is moving away from the intensive ‘gardening’ type of species conservation, with sand lizard populations even being fenced off in some cases, to a more natural, landscape-style approach.