

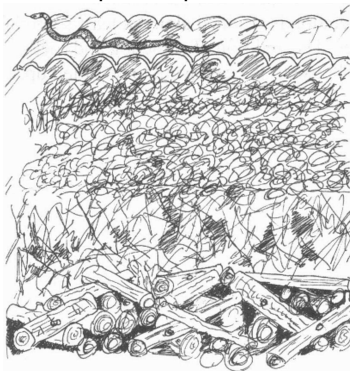
MANAGEMENT OF CHURCHYARDS FOR REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

1. Encourage a mosaic of habitats, not mowing all areas at once, so that refuges are left for protection. Feeding areas, boltholes and hibernation sites need to be connected by corridors of long grass, nettles, brambles etc so that the animals can move around the churchyard while hidden from predators. Strips of longer vegetation along the walls are particularly helpful to slowworms.

Preferably cut on cool days when reptile activity is at a minimum, and check the area is clear before using mowers or strimmers in long grass, as reptiles and amphibians are often injured by machinery.

2. Maintain the sunny compost heaps. Grass snakes will travel quite long distances in search of suitable egg laying sites, such as manure or compost heaps and piles of decaying vegetation, many of which are disappearing from the countryside. These piles can also provide good basking sites.

Heaps need to be in sun at least part of the day to increase decomposition and raise the temperature inside, and beside an area of long grass or vegetation for protected access. A base of logs or branches provides cavities and crevices for shelter and for hunting invertebrate prey. The bigger the heap the better. A diagram of an ideal heap is included. It can be contained within a framework of wooden boards - with gaps to allow creatures access. A heap should be seen as an important part of a wildlife area.



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Compost heap to encourage reptiles and amphibians
Grass snake eggs are pale white, leathery and about 3cm x 2cm, and are usually laid in batches of between 10 and 25, the 15cm long young hatching in August or September. The heap should not be disturbed between June and October when the eggs are developing but it can be searched for empty shells from October.

Corrugated iron or old carpet Cuttings, leaf litter, manure, shredded paper or card Twigs, branches, logs leaving cavities

3. Stone or log piles in long grass are good for reptile security and basking, and are often used by toads as well. A couple of small wood piles in a sunny patch among long grass would also provide extra habitat.

4. Corrugated iron sheets or pieces of roofing felt in south facing positions, surrounded by vegetation, create warm areas for reptiles to bask and hide. On cool overcast days these retain warmth, allowing the animals to regulate their body temperature. These need only be around 60cm x 90cm and can be hidden by a covering of grass cuttings. They need to be out of the way of disturbance but can occasionally be lifted to see what has taken up residence.

5. Walls. Churchyard walls often have plenty of cavities, which can harbour insects for feeding slowworms and toads. Ensure the holes are not filled in. Longer grass or thick vegetation against the walls provides protection for slow-worms to move through the churchyard. It is important to maintain some thick vegetation, where possible.

6. Graves. Holes between the stones harbour invertebrate prey and provide places for hibernation. Spaces below flower containers are sometimes used if there is a way in. South facing sloping stones is good for basking but need to have adjacent vegetation for cover. Some uncut grass around these provides safe corridors.



FURTHER INFORMATION

Froglife 9 Swan Court, Cygnet Park, Hampton,
Peterborough PE7 8GX 01733 558844
info@froglife.org www.froglife.org

British Herpetological Society, 11 Strathmore Place,
Montrose, Angus DD10 8LQ
info@thebhs.org www.thebhs.org