

**HEYFORD PARK, OXFORDSHIRE
GROUND INVESTIGATION WORKS 2011**

ECOLOGICAL STATEMENT

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Rachel Hacking Ecology Limited (RHE) was commissioned in 2011 by Vertase F.L.I. to provide ecological supervision regarding preliminary ground investigations at Heyford Park, Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire.
- 1.2 Heyford Park is a large airbase, which ceased from being used by the military in 1994. Parts of the site are currently used for business purposes, such as vehicle storage or car testing. Large parts of the site are disused. The habitats comprise mainly hardstanding, such as the runways and taxiways, with large expanses of neutral and calcareous grassland. Parts of the grasslands are taken as a crop, other parts are mown for amenity purposes. There are also areas of grassland which appear to be unmanaged.
- 1.3 Heyford Park is known to support protected species including Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* (GCN). Thomson Ecology, in conjunction with Waterman, devised a method statement in 2010 to protect the protected species whilst invasive ground investigations were on-going such as digging bore holes and filling in of Petroleum Oil and Lubricant (POL) tanks. This method statement followed ecology surveys being undertaken on the site.
- 1.4 Vertase F.L.I. was to investigate locations of underground pipeline so that future work could commence cleaning or salvaging the pipelines. In order to undertake the preliminary work, strips of grassland needed to be mown so that vehicles could enter the work area.
- 1.5 Due to tall grassland offering potential terrestrial habitat for GCN and other species, it was necessary to thoroughly search the grassland strips prior to cutting and mowing. RHE was therefore commissioned to search three grassland strips prior to the cutting and mowing taking place, to determine if GCN or other species were present within the grass sward.
- 1.6 Rachel Hacking (Principal Ecologist) carried out the habitat searches. Rachel holds a Natural England Great Crested Newt survey licence (no: 20112250) and has over ten years experience of protected species surveys and ecological supervision during development work.

2.0 ECOLOGICAL SUPERVISION

- 2.1 The site work was undertaken on 21st September 2011. The weather was dry and mild with a slight breeze. The methodology was to mark out a strip of grassland which was to be cut and mown and thoroughly search the grassland strip for the presence of protected species and other wildlife.
- 2.2 First each of the three grassland areas was walked over to check for nesting birds (although late September is out of the ground nesting bird season). Following this, the grass habitat was slowly searched by hand to check for any soil pockets which may provide refuge for wildlife and for any wildlife dispersing through the grass. Once the grassland was deemed clear of wildlife, the grass was cut to approximately 100mm in length. The strip was then walked over and searched again before a mower was used to take the grass down to 50mm in length.
- 2.3 The three sites are described below and photographs are shown of the habitat and the work carried out under ecological supervision.
- 2.4 The cutting and mowing took place at a time of year when Great Crested Newts will be entering their hibernation habitats. The aim of the cutting and mowing was to make the grassland strip as hostile as possible for GCN and other wildlife.

Site 1: Pipeline 73 - 75 and 28R - 29R

- 2.5 A 10 metre wide strip, measuring approximately 90 metres in length, was needed to be cut and mown at this location. The strip ran north to south to take into account both underground pipeline locations. Prior to the hand searching starting, it was noticed that long strips of grassland had already been mown at this location, presumably by farmers or maintenance teams, running east to west, so only parts of the grassland here needed cutting and mowing. A strip was chosen that was considered to be the most botanically species-poor following an initial walkover.
- 2.6 No protected species or other wildlife was seen during the initial walkover, during the hand-searching of the tall grass and during the hand-searching of the cut grass prior to mowing. The ecologist supervised the cutting and mowing. Photographs of Site 1 are shown below.



Photograph 1 showing tall grass prior to cutting and mowing



**Photograph 2 showing cut grassland in foreground prior to mowing
(note strip of previously mown grassland intercepting this strip)**



Photograph 3 showing grassland strip after mowing

Site 2: POL 25a – POL 25b

- 2.7 A strip wide enough to take a vehicle was needed to be cut and mown around POL 25a to POL 25b. Here the grassland was tall and rank and uneven in places. A strip of grassland also needed to be cut leading from the base of the POL to the top.
- 2.8 No protected species or other wildlife was located during the initial walkover, the hand-searching of the tall grassland or the hand-searching of the cut grassland. The ecologist supervised the cutting and mowing. See below for photographs from Site 2.



Photograph 4 showing Site 2 before cutting and mowing



Photograph 5 showing Site 2 after cutting

Site 3: Zone 1 POL 2

- 2.9 Site 3 comprised rank grassland surrounding above ground pipelines and buildings. Many rabbit warrens were located within this site, making the ground uneven. A 5 metre strip was cut and mown here and the grassland was cut and mown around the above ground pipelines.

- 2.10 No protected species or other wildlife was located during the initial walkover, the hand-searching of the tall grassland or the hand-searching of the cut grassland at Site 3. The ecologist supervised the cutting and mowing. See below for photographs from Site 3.



Photograph 6 showing Site 3; uncut grassland to left and right



Photograph 7 showing above ground pipes at Site 3

3.0 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 No protected species or other species were located at any of the three sites during the walkover and the hand-searching. No habitats were affected deleteriously following the cutting and mowing. Large parts of the grasslands at Heyford Park had already been cut or mown prior to the visit on 21st September 2011, due to the ongoing management of the airfield.
- 3.2 The cut and mown areas are now considered to be hostile to protected species and other wildlife due to the lack of cover. However, the short grassland will need to be maintained as such in order for it to continue to be hostile. If a Great Crested Newt is encountered during any works, then the works should stop and a licensed ecologist be contacted.