

**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 grassland strips prior to the cutting and mowing taking place, to determine if GCN or other species were present within the grass sward. A visit was undertaken in September 2011 (see *Ecological Statement September 2011* – RHE Limited) and a second visit, of which this report describes, took place in November 2011.
- 1.6 Rachel Hacking (Principal Ecologist) and Andy Harmer carried out the habitat searches. Both ecologists hold a Natural England Great Crested Newt survey licence (no's: 20112250 and 20111902) and both have over ten years experience of protected species surveys and ecological supervision during development work.

2.0 ECOLOGICAL SUPERVISION

- 2.1 The second visit to Heyford Park took place on 17th November 2011. The weather was sunny and calm. Two grassland areas needed searching prior to cutting and mowing before ground investigations began at the site of an abandoned pipeline.
- 2.2 The two grassland areas were walked over and slowly searched by hand to check for any wildlife, particularly Great Crested Newts. 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 two 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 should be in hibernation. However, the mild temperatures in October and November 2011 meant that there was a small chance of animals still being present above ground.

Site 1: Grid Reference: SP503270

- 2.5 A ten metre long by five metres in width strip of tall grassland was hand searched at Site 1.
- 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. Photographs of Site 1 are shown below.



Photograph 1 showing tall grass prior to cutting and mowing at Site 1



Photograph 2 showing grassland strip at Site 1 after cutting and mowing

Site 2: Grid Reference: SP503269

- 2.7 A triangular area of tall grassland needed searching at Site 2, measuring approximately 10 metres in length. An immature tree belt bordered the area to the east.
- 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.



Photograph 3 showing Site 2 before cutting and mowing



Photograph 4 showing Site 2 after cutting and mowing

3.0 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 No protected species or other species were located at either of the two sites during the walkover and the hand-searching. No habitats were affected deleteriously following the cutting and mowing.
- 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.