

The Reptiles and Amphibia of the Channel Isles, and their Distribution.

by
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The distribution of reptiles and amphibians in Gt. Britain has recently been described by Taylor (1948), but his account does not include a detailed survey of the Channel Islands.

The subject of the reptile and amphibian fauna of these Islands is one not easily approached. The latest published information would appear to be two articles by Sinel (1907, 1908), which are over forty years old and that there are inaccuracies in these is shown by his statements that *Rana temporaria* inhabits Jersey, and that *Natrix natrix* "has no local characteristics."

In order to understand the distribution of the various species amongst the islands, it is wise to consider how these lie.

From the map it will be seen that Alderney, although the most northerly, is the nearest to the French coast; while Jersey is the next nearest, the Guernsey group being well separated from each of these two. Jersey and Guernsey are large islands, while Alderney and Sark are much smaller. Herm is surrounded by shallows, and has obviously at one time been joined to the lesser island of Jethou. Sark juts further out of the sea and is mainly well above the sea level, while Brecqhou has only recently become separated from it: despite none being shown on the map, at least three ponds occur on Sark.

The Guernsey group has been separated from the mainland longer than Jersey, so that its fauna is correspondingly less. It is interesting to note that here again in legend St. Patrick is given the credit. The story runs that he came from his residence in Jersey to meet St. George in Guernsey, where their rendezvous is still known as St. George's Hill. St. Patrick is said to have been so annoyed on this occasion by the rudeness shown him by the inhabitants of Jersey during his residence there that he gathered up all the Guernsey reptiles in his cloak and liberated them in Jersey on his return thither.

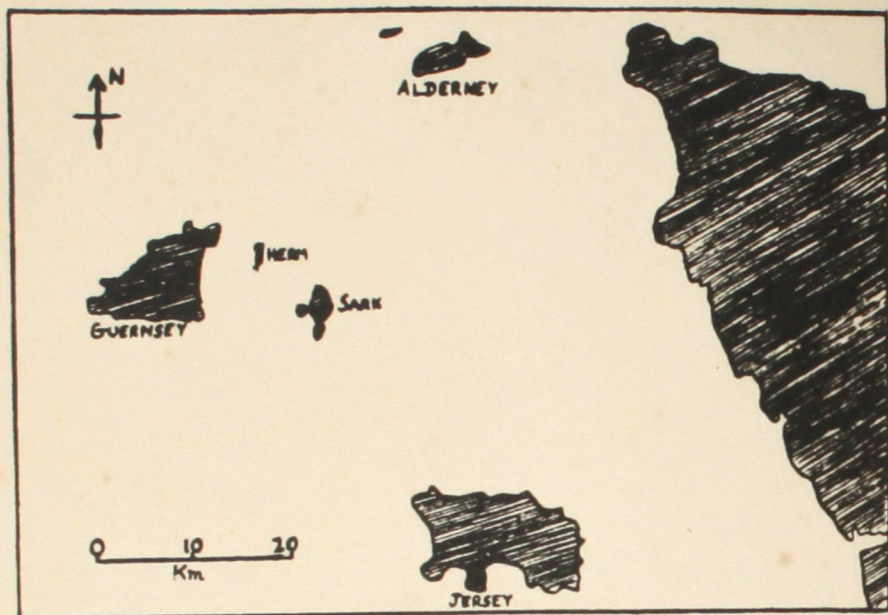
Distribution list.

JERSEY

Kemp's Loggerhead Turtle (*Lepidochelys kempi*)—One stray specimen at Beaumont in December, 1938, now in the Jersey museum.

Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*)—Fairly common in waste places throughout the island.

Green Lizard (*Lacerta viridis*)—This is a fairly common species throughout the island, and very common in some parts. Very large specimens are found in Jersey, and the usual adult size is 12 to 14 inches: the species here is very brightly coloured, the difference between specimens from Jersey and the continent of Europe being very marked.



Wall Lizard (*Lacerta muralis*)—Found only along the North-East coast of the island, from Gorey Common to Bouley Bay. It occurs on the cliffs, but never more than 200 yards inland. Its haunts only very rarely coincide with those of *L. viridis*.

Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*)—Only the var. *astreptophorus*, Seoane is found in this island. This variety occurs also in Cyprus and the Spanish peninsula, and is characterised when adult by the loss of the white or yellow collar (and sometimes also of the black neck markings). No other snakes occur in the island, despite the record of *Coronella austriaca* (Paton, 1949); from the description given, it would appear that this was the present species.

Palmate Newt (*Triturus helveticus*)—The only newt found in Jersey.

Smooth Newt (*Triturus vulgaris*)—Stated by Sinel to be extremely plentiful in Jersey. It does not now occur there.

Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*)—The only toad present, extremely large specimens being not uncommon; this probably accounts for the fact that the Guernsey fisherman's term of opprobrium for a Jerseyman is "a Jersey *crapaud*." It is suggested that the increased size is associated with good feeding, both because insects are plentiful and also on account of the shorter hibernation period: this is about four weeks less than in England.

Nimble Frog (*Rana dalmatina*)—This European type is the only frog occurring in Jersey. It is commoner in the West, getting rarer as one goes East; it is not often seen further East than Mont Mado quarry ponds at St. John's. It is an inhabitant of both North Brittany and Normandy. Sinel has apparently mistaken this species for *R. temporaria* in his Jersey list.

GUERNSEY

Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*)—Stated by Sinel to occur in Guernsey. It appears to be still quite common. The patois term for it is "orvée."

Green Lizard (*Lacerta viridis*)—Found in Guernsey by Sinel and others forty years ago and earlier, having apparently been introduced from Jersey. By 1902 it had apparently become very rare, but is still to be found around Fermain Bay. Said to have been fairly plentiful there a few years ago. Also known at Vallette cliffs.

Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)—The only amphibian occurring in the island.

ALDERNEY

Information about this island is almost non-existent.

Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*)—Fairly common (Sinel).

Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)—Stated by Sinel to occur, presumably in the one well-watered valley. Until specimens are obtained there, it must remain uncertain (in view of his statement about Jersey) whether this species or *R. dalmatina* (formerly *agilis*) is present in the island.

SARK and BRECQHO

Since these two islands have obviously only recently become separated from one another, they are taken together. Brecqhou is in private ownership, so landing is not possible.

Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*)—The only species found in Sark. The only specimen I have taken there was very large by English standards.

HERM and JETHOU

Another pair of islands which seem to merit being taken together.

Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*)—Stated by Sinel to be fairly common in both islands.

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References

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