

LARGE *LACERTA AGILIS* DISCOVERED

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for B.H.S. Conservation Committee, 29 Send Barns Lane, Send, Surrey

On May 9th, 1982, an overcast but warm day, we encountered an extraordinarily large specimen of male Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*). My colleagues and I from the BHSCC were out on one of our many field trips when we observed the Lizard hunting in a small sandy gap within an area of dense old heather.

The Lizard was carefully noosed and immediately measured. Its total length was 223 millimetres snout to tail (83 millimetres snout to vent). When checked, it was confirmed that this specimen was the largest male yet recorded by the BHSCC, although an adult female caught at Studland Bay in Dorset several years ago measured 225 millimetres.

It is difficult to ascertain the precise age of this animal, but we have detailed knowledge of the history of the site where the lizard was found and it is therefore possible to estimate its maximum age. The site is near Farnham in Surrey owned by the Surrey County Council and managed by the BHSCC.

Although now isolated from the main heathland block, the site was originally part of a large continuous tract of heath inhabited by known Sand Lizard and Smooth Snake colonies. The area is known to have had a fire in the 1940's which was probably the cause of the extinction of the native Sand Lizards. The heather habitat recovered slowly. However, this site soon began to suffer the heavy influx of regenerative pine seedlings blown from nearby plantations, a fate shared by many other heathland sites. The BHS located the site in early 1970 and, after initial monitoring for reptiles, it was agreed that the area could become an excellent reintroduction site. The owners consented to clearance of the pine and birch as well as spraying of bracken to allow the heather vegetation to dominate.

The following summer, twenty pairs of Sand Lizards were caught from "doomed" areas in Dorset and translocated to this Surrey site. The Lizards were toe-clipped so that they could be easily identified in future monitoring surveys. Thus, from simple deduction, the maximum age of the captured Sand Lizard, if it had been a first year offspring from the initial releases, could only be ten years.

In the wild state, the average life-span of the Sand Lizard has been estimated to average five to six years, although they have survived in outdoor reptilia for eleven years. This Lizard has obviously found a successful niche in the reintroduction site. As a matter of interest, it is worth noting that, through our improved habitat management, this site now has all six native reptile species breeding on it. It is hoped "Smooth Snakes willing", that we will be fortunate enough to catch another glimpse of this magnificent specimen since we all agreed that the sighting of this Sand Lizard on our reintroduction site made all our conservation efforts well worthwhile.