

## Grass Snakes

A small group of hardy volunteers were doing a Beach Clean on Marloes Beach on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, in distinctly less than ideal conditions (rain). Much to their surprise, on picking up a big pile of rubbish, a grass snake shot out from underneath. It wriggled off quickly then swam across a rock pool and disappeared. This all happened beneath the steep cliffs to the west of the main entrance on to the beach, an area which had recently been covered by a high spring tide. The current theory is that the snake woke early from hibernation, during the warm weather at the end of February, somewhere up at the top of the cliffs. At some stage after the last high tide it then fell down the cliffs on to the beach and decided to hide under a nice pile of rubbish. I hope it has now found its way into more suitable habitat! The onlookers were surprised to see the snake swim across a rockpool – we all know that grass snakes are good swimmers but in salt water??



I have only seen one grass snake since living in Pembrokeshire, and that was quite recently in a newly created meadow and pool in Marloes. It was underneath a “refugium” - a piece of black fibreboard which heats up in the sunshine and which provide reptiles and amphibians, which are cold-blooded, with a suitably warm and secure place to get themselves up to temperature.

I have never seen a grass snake here at Orlandon Kilns, despite being surrounded by streams, damp fields, marshes, reedbeds, ponds and other habitat which grass snakes are supposed to just love! And we have compost heaps too, for them to lay their eggs in.

But maybe the reason is in fact another mystery – we do not have any frogs. I have no idea why, not even a theory. I understand that even in Dale, home of the proverbial Dale Frogs, there are few actual frogs. Grass Snakes just love to eat frogs. So maybe no frogs, no snakes. But apparently they eat toads as well (presumably they are not affected by the poison in the toads?) We have plenty of toads.

When we first built our pond I imported some frog spawn in the first year, as I thought that there might not be any frogs nearby. It is possible that some of these eggs reached adulthood as I did see just one frog in the pond once or twice in the following years. But never any spawn, and I haven't seen anything for many years now.

So I have put down a refugium to see what I can attract – it is possible there are grass snakes around but we are just not seeing them. I await April with interest, when grass snakes usually come out of hibernation (or February if they are at Marloes Sands!)

*Rosemary Royle*