

THE SAND LIZARD IN NORTH-EAST ENGLAND

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INTRODUCTION

This work attempts to define the known distribution and establish the present faunal status of the Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* in north-eastern England, from the Scottish border to the north shore of the Wash, east of the Pennine watershed between Irish Sea and North Sea streams. It is based on a field investigation and review of the literature, mainly between 1966 and 1973. Only some of the more important reports are considered. The work followed and partly overlapped investigations in the north-west (Simms, 1969). Furthermore, some localities were repeatedly mentioned in reports, and these have had most attention. Lizards cannot always be located even in restricted habitats, except by repeated visits and close search in appropriate conditions. The author is conscious that some localities, notably Spurn, Gibraltar Point, Donna Nook and Teesmouth have not had the attention they need: but these are all places regularly visited by active naturalists and before very long can be expected to yield any secrets they yet hold.

Since the publication by Simms (1969) there have been "unhappy developments" in the name of "conservation". Reptiles have been removed from some good localities for ill-considered breeding or re-stocking experiments which generally seem to have failed. It is hoped that any Sand Lizards remaining in the north-east, whatever their origin, will not be interfered with unnecessarily. As in the previous paper this account is imprecise as to locality, and the notes on which it is based will not be "available". This is a critical review of reports; both published as "records", and unpublished, which have come to my notice.

This account was compiled before the recent revision of County and other boundaries: here the "old" boundaries still apply in every case.

NORTH-EAST ENGLAND

Northumberland

Taylor's (1963) record for the coast of Beadnell, Seahouses, in 1963, in my opinion, derives from a reliable source and there are good sight records of *Lacerta agilis* from this part of the Northumberland coast in a few subsequent years. My own research there (since 1966) has been unsuccessful, except to reveal large numbers of *L. vivipara* rather vulnerable to increasing public pressure. Correspondence with D. Bowes (pers. comm.) and further visits by both of us have led to the conclusion that this population, if it survives, is of introduced origin and derives from individuals released at Bamburgh in 1962. There is no evidence known to me of breeding at this locality; nor of any specimens in vivaria or preserved collections. The Northumberland coast is still relatively little-worked by naturalists and does not have a markedly cooler or more cloudy summer than further south in north-east England. We are still far from knowing the critical climatological or population factors for survival of the species, which has a wide Continental range.

Durham County

Calvert (1884) clearly does not distinguish between *Lacerta vivipara* and *L. agilis* when, under the latter name, he states (p. 137) that it is "common on the sand banks of the coast and near the moor edges in the west, but it appears to be rare in the intervening districts". The same may be said of other Durham reports within my notice. In the east the dene country has several current stations for *L. vivipara*, and greenish individuals occur. "Green" viviparous lizards, at a casual glance, are particularly likely to be

mistaken for Sand Lizards, as are the heavily maculate (and especially the ocellate) straw-yellow specimens, which help make up the variable populations of this species (Simms 1971d p. 103). On the Magnesian Limestone and further west in the Pennine valleys of Tees, Wear and Derwent there are several stations for the commoner species. Recent reports of "Sand Lizard" from naturalists near Crook and Seaton Carew (various pers. comm.) have been satisfactorily referred to *Lacerta vivipara*. There are no extensive spreads of typical north-British *agilis* habitats (Simms, in prep.) anywhere in the county, but there have been escapes of captive Sand Lizards and of other European species, in urban Tees-side and elsewhere, which could have led to reports or might yet do so.

Northumberland and Durham are still little known for their reptiles and *Lacerta agilis* is not the only species to have uncertain status there. The coastal sandy habitat has been relatively little disturbed in some parts of the region compared with, say, south-west Lancashire.

Yorkshire, North Riding

There appear to be no reports of Sand Lizards for vice-counties 62 or 65, (Watsonian system), before the two English *Lacerta* were generally recognised as distinct species during the last third of the nineteenth century. Typical of many uncritical applications of the name *Lacerta agilis* is that of Wolstenholme (1883) describing Strensall Common: "The small lizards *Lacerta agilis* very common". No doubt the trivial name contributed to the confusion: *vivipara* is certainly more agile than *agilis*! There have been several reports of *Lacerta agilis* from the South Gare at Teesmouth during the past 20 years. Few only need be taken seriously but the possibility of their presence remains. Repeated visits have shown this worker only *Lacerta vivipara*. "Sand Lizard" is a vernacular name still applied to the "dry eft" (*L. vivipara*) of the coastal sand and boulder-clay of Redcar and Marske, and the name is also known in the morainic central Vale of York and in the Vale of Pickering. At one farm near Malton I was shown Common (Smooth) Newts *Triturus vulgaris* as "Sand Lizards" by a farmer quite familiar with most vertebrates.

Yorkshire, East Riding and West Riding (part)

Here the best case for *Lacerta agilis*, as a member of the north-eastern fauna, can be made. Taylor (1963) mentions the 1959 sight record at Spurn Point by Waterston. This was the starting-point of my investigation. Waterston would not be mistaken but it is surprising that a small peninsula, so often regularly visited by naturalists over a long period, has yielded so very few good records. Of the several reports, very few were from experienced observers until the capture of a female *L. agilis* in October, 1970 (Simms, 1971a, b and c). The 1946 record for Spurn (Y.N.U. Annual Report, and Taylor) cannot be substantiated but the situation is confused perhaps by the possibility of repeated introduction.

In 1949 17 lizards (9 gravid females) from Dorset were released on sandy land around the Dunsroft district near Doncaster (Bunting 1950). There is no sign of them today, but no guarantee that others have not been released in other localities. The gross morphology and pigmentation of the 1970 Spurn specimen accords more with forms typical of Dorset or the western fringes of the continent than with the rather distinctive Lancashire populations (Simms, in prep.). In June 1969 at Sherburn (Vale of Pickering) J. Radley and I heard accounts of large, brightly-coloured lizards seen there and at Willerby nearby, by an elderly labourer from time to time over the past 20 years, who was "certain" they matched illustrations of *L. agilis* (Simms (1971d) and Smith (1951)). We were, however, unable to examine specimens.

Clarke and Roebuck (1881) dismiss reports of the Sand Lizard for Yorkshire, whilst allowing those from Durham and Northumberland to stand. In their *Supplement (Naturalist 1884)* they maintained their opinion for Yorkshire and reduced the Northumbrian occurrence to the status of "myth"!

Derbyshire, North and Nottinghamshire, North

No reports worthy of serious attention are known.

Lincolnshire, Lindsey

Taylor's (1963) records refer to "dunes near Sutton-on-Sea, Huttoft Island". I have found Common Lizards at the former site, none at the latter. These are known locally as "Sand Lizards". (Mackenzie Thorpe and others, pers. comm.). The dunes inland of Donna Nook have figured in verbal reports but these are unsubstantiated. The Common Lizard occurs. Investigations were extended in 1972 to the Hemsby Sand dunes and elsewhere in Norfolk (on the advice of R. H. Clark); *L. vivipara* but no *L. agilis* were found.

SUMMARY

Records of the Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*) in north-eastern England now substantiated are known only from Northumberland and Yorkshire coasts; in both cases almost certainly the result of attempted introduction. No preserved specimens from the region are known in any public or private collection: the 1970 Spurn individual was released where captured after being taken to York for photography and examination. Smith (1951, map p. 192) does not acknowledge the occurrence of the species anywhere in the region treated here "at the present time". If "naturalists" persist in the ill-documented transfer of herpetofauna from place to place we can perhaps look to further revision and an even less natural distribution.

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APPENDIX. NOMENCLATURE.

Linnaeus (*Systema Natura* Ed. 10, 1758) did not have the Sand Lizard solely in mind when he first used the binomial *Lacerta agilis*. Notoriously, his genus *Lacerta* included, at various times, both newts and crocodiles as well as lizards! In view of this the correct full scientific name for the Sand Lizard might read *Lacerta agilis* L. (partim).

Synonyms of *Lacerta agilis* which are fairly frequently used in the other literature include:

<i>Lacerta (di) Linneo</i>	C. L. Bonaparte
<i>Seps argus</i>	Laurenti 1768
<i>Lacerta stirpium</i>	Daudin 1882 = <i>arenicola</i> Daudin
<i>Lacerta anguiformis</i>	Sheppard 1804

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