



Use of SARG Survey Infrastructure



Steve Langham

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. SARG has invested heavily in the establishment of many long-term reptile survey sites across the region. This investment comprises the cost of materials (refugia and labels) and time (planning and conducting the laydown and negotiating access for surveyors). Occasionally, we are approached for permission to use this infrastructure for third party uses which may include corporate training or commercial safari purposes. This policy statement outlines the difficulties this raises for SARG, and potential methods for compromise.
- 1.2. SARG uses long-term survey sites for a variety of purposes. These include the training of SARG surveyors, using the survey results as a statistical control for regional trends and to provide land managers with site species distributions in order to inform habitat management plans.
- 1.3. There is occasionally some reluctance from land managers towards the establishment of a reptile survey infrastructure, as the existence of refugia may complicate management activities (e.g. mechanical vegetation management or grazing), and the perceived increase in human pressure could affect the habitat (in terms of the establishment of preference paths), species (e.g. ground nesting birds) and primary uses (e.g. army training).
- 1.4. To mitigate this reluctance, SARG establishes an access agreement with land owners or managers which allows survey activities, yet restricts the way in which the survey infrastructure is managed.

2. The Land Manager Covenant

2.1. There are some key principles which allow SARG to create and maintain fixed reptile survey infrastructure. These comprise:

- All survey effort is by permission from the land manager, and this permission can be withdrawn at any time.
- All distribution and conservation data collected will be made available to the land manager.
- Surveys will be limited to ten site visits per year.
- All surveyors will be SARG surveyors, trained and identifiable by a SARG ID card.
- All surveyors will be insured through the ARG-UK insurance scheme (so must be ARG members).
- Surveyors will hold appropriate Natural England exemption licences commensurate with those species known to occupy the site.
- Surveyors must have access to up-to-date site sensitivities (e.g. Nightjar nests, this is managed by the SARGWEB system).
- The infrastructure will not be used for any commercial purposes.

3. Possible Compromises

- 3.1. On occasion, SARG are approached by third parties, who maintain a good relationship with us who wish to use the SARG infrastructure for purposes contributing to the conservation effort.
- 3.2. Where the requirement is to train staff in the capture of reptile species for mitigation projects SARG would direct consultancies to utilise receptor sites, where translocations have taken place and European Protected Species are less prevalent.
- 3.3. For survey and identification purposes SARG has devised the following approach which may allow for third party survey without risking the arrangements we hold with land managers.
- 3.4. In essence, it may be possible for the activity to be viewed as a SARG survey or training event. In order to qualify for this, the following criteria must be applied:
 - The activity lead must be a current SARG member.
 - The activity lead must have undergone reptile survey training through SARG with appropriate SARGWEB permissions.
 - The activity lead must hold a Natural England Exemption licence for those reptile species known to occupy the site.
 - All participants must be covered by the ARG-UK insurance scheme (i.e. be a member of an ARG).
 - Survey results must be reported via the SARGWEB online system.
 - The size of the survey party, including the lead should not exceed six persons (to minimise disturbance and habitat damage and to maximise the chances of reptile encounters).
 - Care must be taken to ensure that a site does not receive more than ten survey visits within a season.
 - The only reptiles captured should be smooth snakes for the purposes of recording biometrics.

4. Contact

- 4.1. For further discussion or clarification of this policy, please contact either the SARG Chair (chair@surrey-arg.org.uk) or the SARG Reptiles Officer (reptiles@surrey-arg.org.uk).