



Reptile Survey Support to Environmental Stewardship



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SARG Reptile Survey Support to Environmental Stewardship

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Environmental Stewardship (ES) is an agri-environment scheme that is open to all farmers and land managers, and is funded by the UK Government and the European Union (EU). Farmers and land managers across England enter into voluntary management agreements with Natural England in order to deliver the scheme. In return for looking after England's countryside – our wildlife, landscapes, historic features and natural resources (soils and water) – and providing new opportunities for public access in some cases, ES provides farmers and land managers with a financial incentive that supports and rewards them for this work. ES is managed by Natural England on behalf of Defra.
- 1.2. In order to manage habitat in an effective way to support biodiversity, baseline surveys are required to determine which species are present, and where these species occur.
- 1.3. SARG does not normally conduct reptile surveys to support environmental stewardship applications, however; we may sometimes choose to assist with survey effort, providing the site in question is large (>25 Ha), has public access, and aligns with the strategic aims of SARG.
- 1.4. If your site has restricted access to the public, is of small area, or a focussed survey is required to a tight timescale, then the best course of action is to employ a specialist reptile surveyor through an ecological consultancy. SARG can, on request, provide a list of such consultancies to whom we have issued data searches, but we have no means of assessing the competence of these consultancies, and any list provided should not be interpreted as a recommendation.

2. Reptile Survey

- 2.1. If you are interested in determining whether SARG would be interested in supporting your reptile survey requirements, you should email the SARG Chair: Chair@surrey-arg.org.uk who can advise you on whether reptile survey of your site supports SARG strategic goals.
- 2.2. Should there be intent on both sides to proceed with a SARG-assisted reptile survey, we will require a plan of the site, clearly indicating the site boundary. We will then overlay this boundary onto Aerial Photography to make our first estimate of those areas of habitat that are most likely to support reptiles.
- 2.3. For large area survey we use a refugia-based grid system, laying refugia at a density of one 'tin' per hectare, placing each tin in the best micro-habitat within each hectare offering suitable conditions to support reptiles. We have IT tools for producing a draft plan, which will indicate the number and placement of refugia and site access points.

3. Costs

- 3.1. SARG is a non-profit-making and resource-limited organisation. For reptile survey assistance to environmental stewardship applications, we expect the sponsor to donate the infrastructure costs for the survey (refugia materials and manufacture). Prices of the raw corrugated iron material vary with market fluctuations, however when factoring in material costs, cutting, transportation and placement using herpetological expertise, the cost works out to be approximately £5 per tin.
 - *A 30 hectare site, all of which offers suitable reptile habitat, would equate to an infrastructure cost of about £150. (30 tins x £5).*
- 3.2. SARG would retain ownership of these materials after the survey, ideally to establish a longer term monitoring activity at the site, or to deploy elsewhere to benefit the conservation of reptiles.
- 3.3. If you have access to a 3-inch corrugated-iron sheet, and choose to cut these sheets into SARG specification tins, then you would not be required to pay for the infrastructure costs.
- 3.4. If you wish, SARG can produce a reptile survey report. Please see the *Reporting* section for costs.

4. Limitations

- 4.1. For very large sites, SARG may not be able to generate the resources for complete site coverage. In such cases, SARG may propose that a representative area can be surveyed as a 'sub-site'. Inferences can be drawn concerning the absence or presence of reptile species at other, non-surveyed areas of the site by examining habitat linkages (amongst other factors).
- 4.2. SARG uses trained volunteer surveyors, so can never guarantee the number of surveys which will be undertaken across a reptile season (March to September). However; we can influence surveyor priorities, and would set a goal of ten surveys per season.
- 4.3. Reptile survey is more complex than merely checking tins and correctly identifying those reptiles using the tins for shelter. Only the 'legless' reptiles habitually use tins, with the legged lizards, and to some extent the adder, being better detected by the use of experienced and trained visual survey of the areas between tins. Tins are used to both enhance the success rate of reptile observations and to mark transects across the open habitat between the tins.

5. Reporting

- 5.1. The results of reptile survey at the site would be accessible through restricted access of the SARG website (not open to the public), and emails of each survey completed can be automatically forwarded to you as the sponsor.
- 5.2. We would not normally generate a formal survey report at the end of the survey period, but we do have the ability to generate such reports, and may choose to provide such, at your request in exchange for a £50 donation to SARG.
- 5.3. A SARG reptile survey report will show those species present on the site, and calculate the probable absence of species not observed. Additionally, an indication of the relative population size and reptile spatial distribution will be provided.
- 5.4. If you choose to construct the survey report yourself, we will have been able to provide you with the required survey data. Your interpretation of this data cannot be endorsed by SARG.