

Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group
SARG Strategy Paper



SARG Strategy 2012



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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Surrey amphibian and reptile group is a non-profit-making wildlife conservation organisation, based in the United Kingdom's county of Surrey. SARG focuses on the care and preservation of wild, native reptiles and amphibians.
- 1.2. SARG was established in 1987 by people with an interest in Surrey's herpetology. Surrey is very fortunate in being home to all of the UK's native species of reptiles and amphibians (except for the Northern-clade pool frog), including European protected species such as the Smooth Snake and Great Crested Newt. We want to see these creatures thrive in the County.
- 1.3. We are a mixture of hobbyists, scientists, and conservationists; amateurs and professionals, committed to sharing knowledge and understanding of these much-misunderstood and endangered animals.
- 1.4. We are affiliated to, although independent from, the Surrey Wildlife Trust, and form part of the national ARG-UK network. We work voluntarily to prevent habitat destruction and resist damaging planning applications. We give advice to residents and organisations, work with schools and educational bodies, and help with numerous "toad-crossing" sites throughout Surrey.

2. Strategic Direction

- 2.1. In order to ensure that SARG is not only doing things right, but more importantly doing the right things; this strategy document provides the guidance and direction for SARG priorities during 2012.
- 2.2. Additionally in 2012, SARG shall produce a *reptile strategy document* and an *amphibian strategy document*.
- 2.3. The means of testing whether we are following strategic guidance shall be through the new balanced scorecard system initiated towards the end of 2011.

3. SARG Mission Statement – (What we do)

3.1. To support the conservation of wild, native amphibian and reptile species with an emphasis on the county of Surrey, through:

- Survey, surveillance and monitoring, including training.
- Habitat management support
- Education of the public
- Scientific and academic research
- Providing value to our members to ensure their continued support

4. Geographic scope

4.1. SARG area of operations will be the vice county of Surrey and the current political boundary of Surrey. We shall support activities beyond these boundaries only where there is close consultation and agreement with the relevant ARG.

5. SARG Vision – (Where we want to be)

5.1. Through excellence of conservation effort, to be recognised as the leading regional herpetological conservation group in the United Kingdom, and to use this position to support the advancement of herpetological conservation nationally.

6. Working in partnership

6.1. Strategic partnership is essential to SARG activities in order to identify gaps and overlaps in conservation effort to enable us to maximise efficiency in the use of scarce and valuable resources (money and people). Our priority partners for 2012 will be:

- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust
- Natural England
- Surrey Wildlife Trust and BRIC
- The National Trust
- Surrey Borough Councils
- Surrey Fire & Rescue Service
- Kent, Sussex, Berkshire and Hampshire ARGs

7. Reptile Survey Strategic Objectives

7.1. Reptile survey process objectives

- To define and formally record our reptile survey processes, including our lessons identified and learned processes.

7.2. Reptile survey people and training objectives

- To increase the number of active reptile surveyors, with a goal of achieving 60 active surveyors for the 2012 season.
- To build on our past success with the Rare Reptile Course with an improved syllabus for 2012. Moving towards a 2-year course for 2013.
- To establish a formal volunteers training day early in the 2012 season. (Possibly to replace the reptile NARRS training).

7.3. Reptile survey infrastructure objectives

- To increase the number of long-term reptile survey sites within Surrey, and to help neighbouring ARGs to set up additional sites beyond the Surrey borders. Priorities should be:
 - To cover the known range of European protected reptile species within the western Weald.
 - ARC priority sites from the reintroduction of European rare reptile species across the western Weald, particularly within the Surrey borders.
 - Reptile sites in the east of the county of Surrey, particularly in the districts of Tandridge, Reigate & Banstead and Mole Valley.
 - Prospective adder sites within the M25.

7.4. Reptile survey equipment objectives

- Ensure that we have sufficient GPS hand-held receivers to cater for enthusiastic and capable surveyors who may not be able to afford their own equipment.
- To acquire cost-effective biometric recording equipment to compliment the 2012 rare reptile course.
- To procure sufficient materials for new reptile survey sites.

8. Amphibian Survey Strategic Objectives

8.1. The two key priorities for 2012 amphibian survey are to build upon our success with monitoring the Natterjack toad population at Frensham, and to establish and test an amphibian survey and recording process.

8.2. Amphibian survey process objectives

- To generate and formally record our amphibian survey processes, including our lessons identified and learned processes.

8.3. Amphibian survey people and training objectives

- To create a baseline for 2012 by recording the number of active members involved in amphibian survey tasks.

8.4. Amphibian survey infrastructure objectives

- To review the SARG key ponds database to ensure that we have identified and have survey permissions for at least one pond supporting widespread species and one pond supporting GCN in each Surrey borough.

8.5. Amphibian survey equipment objectives

- To generate a stocktake of current SARG amphibian survey equipment, identify any shortfalls and to acquire any necessary additional equipment.

9. Toad Crossing Strategic Objectives

9.1. Toad crossing process objectives

- To create a SARG guide or handbook for toad crossing wardens and volunteers.

9.2. Toad crossing people and training objectives

- To create a baseline for 2012 by recording the number of active members involved in toad crossings.

9.3. Toad crossing infrastructure objectives

- To review the registered and reported toad crossing sites across Surrey, and to assign priorities against each.

9.4. Toad crossing equipment objectives

- To generate a stocktake of current SARG toad crossing equipment, identify any shortfalls and to acquire any necessary additional equipment.

10. Habitat Management

10.1. Habitat management is perhaps the most vital aspect of the work that ARG do. Put simply; without suitable habitat, there would be no wild animals.

10.2. There are several strands to Habitat management, comprising:

- Gaining influence with land managers, such that advice is heeded.
- Helping land managers with their management plans through provision of data such as species distributions, sensitive areas and trend information.
- Advising Land managers how they can improve their site for reptiles and amphibians.
- Leading or assisting volunteer habitat management tasks. In general, SARG will support the various land management partners in their task schedule. Particular priority will be given to ARC tasks, in support of European protected species within Surrey. Additionally we will champion the habitat management of the Beambrook ponds, due to their unique historic context.

10.3. Habitat management process objectives

- To generate a SARG guide for building and maintaining a garden wildlife pond.

10.4. Habitat management people and training objectives

- To create a baseline for 2012 by recording the number of active members involved in habitat management tasks.

10.5. Habitat management equipment objectives

- To generate a stocktake of current SARG habitat management equipment, identify any shortfalls and to acquire any necessary additional equipment.

11. Education of the public

11.1. We shall review the SARG website with a view to how it may be improved to provide the best engagement with the public. This will include a drive to increase web traffic to the site, measured by means of its Alexia ranking.

11.2. We shall devise a means of measuring the effectiveness of our public education activities.

11.3. We shall continue to support public events, providing they fall within the availability windows as defined by the SARG generic schedule. Priority will be given to supporting partner organisations as this provides additional strategic benefits.

11.4. We shall record member activity for supporting public engagement events.

12. Scientific and academic research

- 12.1. Whenever possible we will use our data, our infrastructure and our knowledge to support undergraduate and postgraduate research projects.
- 12.2. SARG will build upon its own research work and will focus on a means for providing species condition assessments and trends for all survey sites and at county levels.
- 12.3. SARG will continue to lead and develop the regional adder project.
- 12.4. SARG will continue to lead and develop the national wall lizard project.
- 12.5. We will encourage attendance, and particularly submission of papers to the three key annual herpetological conferences (HWM, BHS/ARC & Regional ARG).

13. The Membership

- 13.1. The SARG membership is the life-blood of the organisation. Without the SARG membership becoming actively involved in SARG activities, the conservation benefits that we are able to provide are limited.
- 13.2. Early in 2012 we shall hold a workshop (possibly as the main aspect of a committee meeting) to brainstorm ways of increasing the value of membership to SARG.
- 13.3. The SARG Facebook page seems to be an effective means of engaging a section of the membership, and may help recruitment. Development and activity on the SARG Facebook page will be encouraged and developed.
- 13.4. The key aspect of gearing the membership to conservation benefit is to improve our ability to get our members to become more active. As we currently have no means of recording how many active members we have, we shall develop a system to record activity to create a baseline for 2012 upon which we can improve in subsequent years. Our new Volunteers Officer role is key in improving the activity of our members.