

SARG Guide

Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group



# SARG Rare Reptile Course Syllabus



**Steve Langham & Jamel Guenioui**

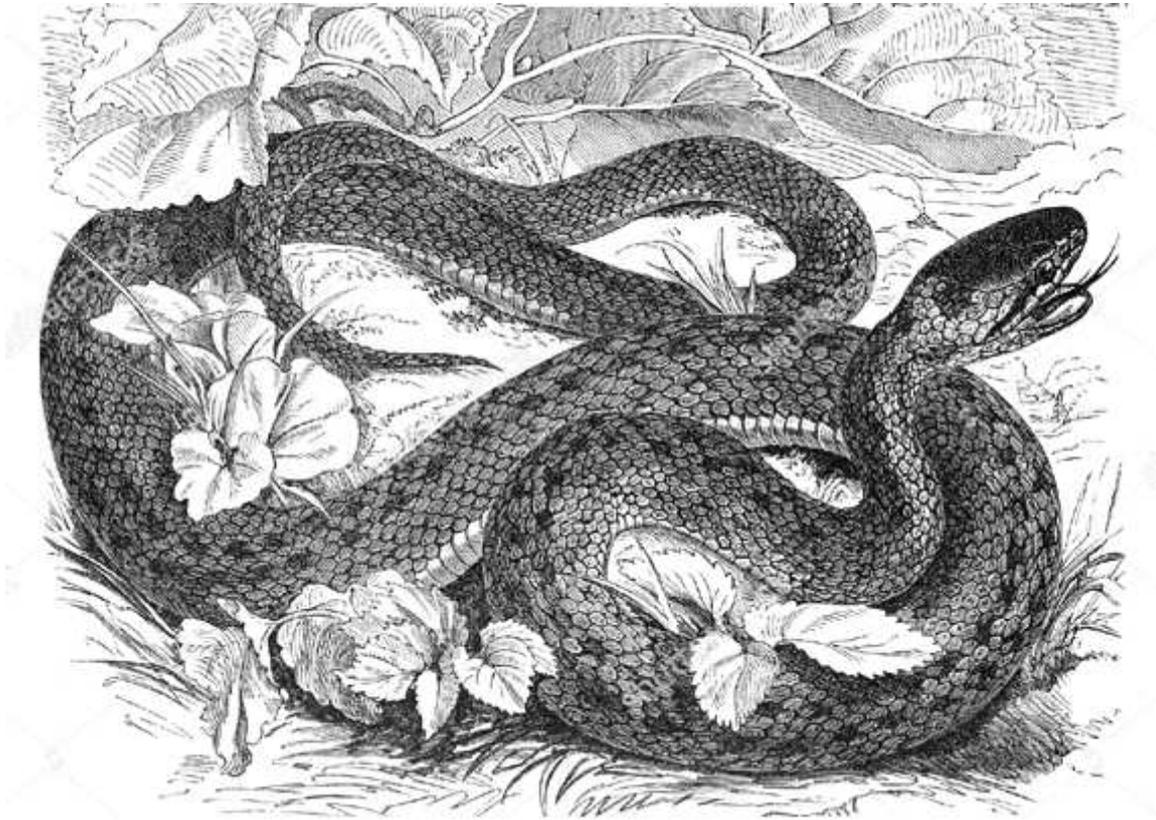
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# SARG Rare Reptile Course Syllabus

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## **SARG Rare Reptile Course Syllabus**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group (SARG) Rare Reptile Course (RRC) is primarily designed to provide ecologists with the opportunity for experience with sand lizards and smooth snakes in the wild, commensurate with the requirements for obtaining a licence from Natural England to disturb and take animals where it would normally be a statutory offence.
- 1.2. The course educates attendees about the animals' ecology, identification and the requirements for safe survey conditions.
- 1.3. Although a nominal fee is charged for the course, SARG benefits from the high quality of survey data generated by the course, supporting the conservation of the species.
- 1.4. Attendees gain from a well structured course over the duration of two survey seasons, which has been continuously improved since 2008. The SARG RRC has a strong reputation of providing quality survey experience which generates practical conservation evidence.
- 1.5. This guide outlines the course syllabus, course requirements and goals for successful achievement. In line with the SARG objective of being a 'learning organisation' this guidance will change over time to reflect review and improvement of the course components.

### **2. Entry requirements**

- 2.1. The RRC is aimed at professional ecological consultants. (There is a sister programme for non-professionals of a longer duration.) As such, you will need to be already experienced with the survey and identification of widespread reptile species. The course will improve your ability to survey widespread species, and will highlight the relatively small differences required for the safe survey of the rarer reptile species.
- 2.2. In future years, a photographic identification test will need to be completed prior to acceptance. Our technology isn't quite there yet.
- 2.3. You will be asked for written line manager approval as a course entry requirement. Experience has taught us that this significantly reduces drop out rates and helps to frame the students in the appropriate professional mindset.
- 2.4. You must be a current SARG member, for insurance cover and website access privileges. You must sign a SARG Volunteer Working Agreement.

### **3. Syllabus Outline**

#### **3.1. Initial Training Day – Direction whilst undertaking a field survey**

##### 3.1.1. Course objectives

- SARG and student perspectives

##### 3.1.2. Reptile survey objectives

- Conservation and professional standards perspectives

##### 3.1.3. Species context

- Conservation status and distribution
- Legal protection, licensing and threats

##### 3.1.4. Reptile behaviour

- Ecology
- Meteorological factors – Survey window and timings

##### 3.1.5. Identifying reptile habitat

##### 3.1.6. Survey techniques

- Choice and combination of techniques
- Visual survey: techniques
- Refugia survey: for detection and waypoints for monitoring
- Combined survey; cross species detection
- Minimising impact to the habitat

##### 3.1.7. Reptile ID: Tips and practical field work

- Smooth snake handling & biometrics

##### 3.1.8. Recording protocol

- Format and methods
- Negative records
- Reporting survey results

##### 3.1.9. Safe working practices/health and safety

**3.2. Solo Survey Days** – Assessment of the student’s application of:

- 3.2.1. Meteorological judgement
- 3.2.2. Survey planning
- 3.2.3. Finding refugia
- 3.2.4. Visual and refugia survey
- 3.2.5. Identification skills
- 3.2.6. Recording
- 3.2.7. Reporting

**3.3. Sand Lizard Burrow Survey Day** – in June, in either season of survey

- 3.3.1. Sand lizard burrow identification
- 3.3.2. Sand lizard burrow recording and reporting

**3.4. Accompanied Survey**

- 3.4.1. Review of survey technique
- 3.4.2. Review of recording protocol
- 3.4.3. Answers to any issues

**3.5. Survey Lead**

- 3.5.1. This can be combined with a solo survey or an accompanied survey

**3.6. Online Assessment**

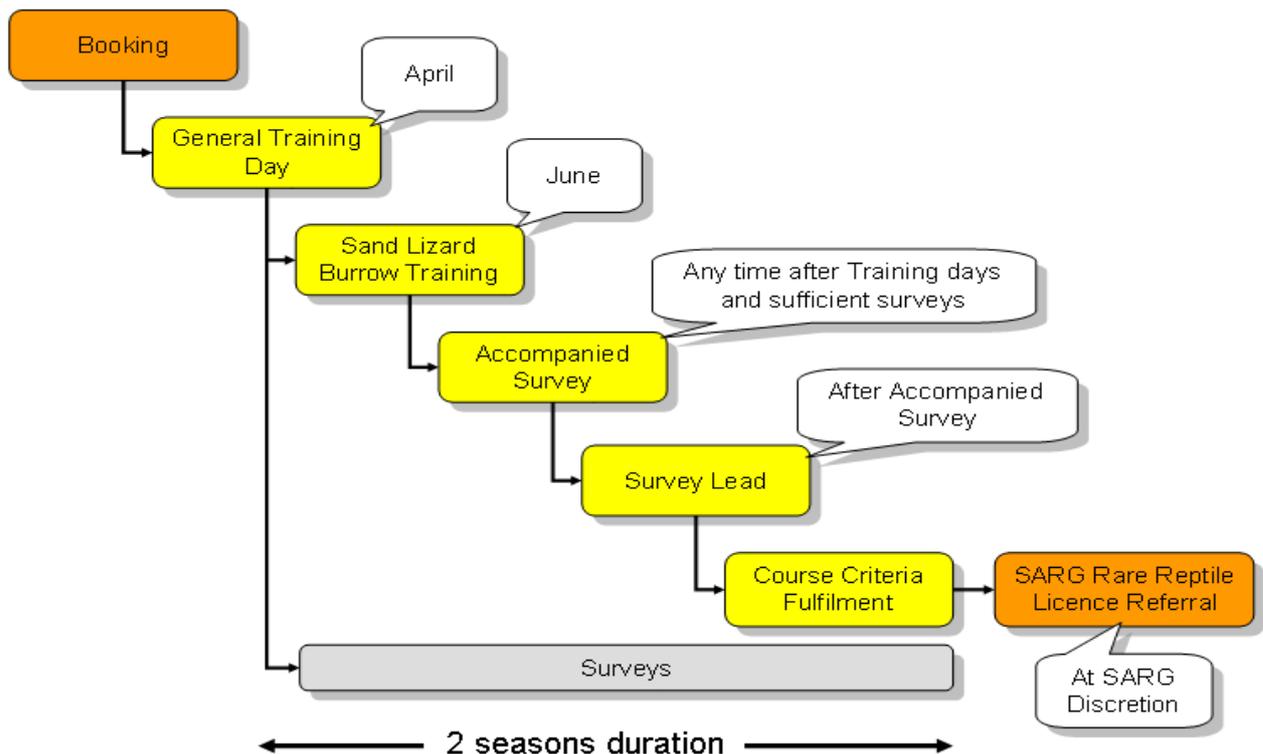
- 3.6.1. Review of reporting

**3.7. Post Course Assistance**

- 3.7.1. Certification of accomplishments & log book
- 3.7.2. Supply of SARG reference for NE licence (at our discretion)
- 3.7.3. Assistance with licence application paperwork (on request)
- 3.7.4. Opportunity to continue voluntary survey

#### 4. SARG RRC Calendar

- 4.1. Booking a place on the course can be done at any time. The RRC is normally over-subscribed and if a place is not available for the coming season, you can request to be put on the waiting list for the next available place. Email: [Reptiles@surrey-arg.org.uk](mailto:Reptiles@surrey-arg.org.uk).
- 4.2. After an initial training day (usually in April), students are required to conduct a number of solo surveys to put the course direction into practice. Sand lizard burrow survey days will be held every June and it is a course requirement to attend one of these days prior to completion of the course.
- 4.3. Each student must attend an accompanied survey by a course instructor in their second season of the course. This is intended to identify where improvements could be made and to ensure that the student is undertaking surveys in a manner which maximises care for the animals and is in line with best practice.
- 4.4. An experimental component introduced in the 2017 course is for each student to lead a group of less experienced surveyors, imparting knowledge gained from the course to educate others. This would count towards the solo survey targets and must cater for at least one SARG member (maximum of 5) who has not enrolled on the RRC. This must be arranged by the course tutor to maximise value. This may be combined with the accompanied survey.
- 4.5. A generic timeline for the course is shown below:



## 5. RRC Completion Criteria

5.1. Successful completion of the course requires all of the following:

- Attendance for the initial training day
- Attendance for a sand lizard burrow survey day
- Successful recording (including biometrics) for solo surveys
- The survey of at least 8 different SARG core reptile sites
  - At least 5 of which support rare reptile species
  - At least 3 of which support only widespread reptile species
- Having checked a minimum of 150 refugia
- Two seasons of survey experience
- Conducting an accompanied survey with a course instructor
- Leading a reptile survey
- Having worked to the conditions of the accredited licence
- Having worked to the SARG health and safety directions
- Dealing professionally with members of the public, land management agents or law enforcement officers that are encountered.
- Although there is no hard limit placed on the numbers of smooth snakes or sand lizards that you encounter, these must be enough for Natural England to have confidence of sufficient experience with the species. A suggested target is the encounter of not less than 5 smooth snake and 3 sand lizard specimens.
- Finally, you must have maintained the confidence of the SARG instructors that you have behaved professionally and with integrity.

## 6. Equipment Requirements

6.1. Use of the following equipment is required to undertake the course. Unless stated explicitly, it is the students' responsibility to provide their own equipment.

### 6.2. Clothing

- Normal outdoor clothing appropriate for the habitat and weather conditions is required. Particular emphasis is placed on the provision of appropriate footwear. Walking boots or desert boots are ideal for most of the reptile survey sites.
- Wearing shorts is not recommended due to the presence of gorse and brambles on the majority of the survey sites.

### 6.3. Hydration

- Taking a source of water is an important consideration in summer months, especially for the larger or more desolate sites. An ideal option is one of the hydration solutions that can be worn as a backpack, such as a Camelbak. However; a water flask or drinks container is sufficient.

### 6.4. Skin Protection

- Heathland can be an unforgiving habitat in sunny conditions; the application of sun lotion is advised.
- Many of our reptile survey sites have sheep ticks (*Ixodes ricinus*), so application of insecticide to trouser bottoms and sleeve areas may be desirable. Ensure that hands are clean from insecticides before handling reptiles.

### 6.5. Navigation Equipment

- You will need to find refugia from the British National Grid (BNG) references provided. A hand held GPS unit is ideal for this task, although with the advent of Smart Phone technology, you may be able to find an appropriate App (that can import .GPX files). Do not rely on maps to find refugia, experience has shown this to be a frustrating waste of time.

### 6.6. Biometric Recording Equipment

- The essential equipment required for biometric recording are a camera (possibly a Smart Phone camera), a spring scale and a calibrated measurement card for recording lengths. The recording card and spring balance will be provided as part of the course materials covered by the fee.

## **7. Travel and Subsistence**

- 7.1. All travel and subsistence expenses are to be met by the course students. SARG does not have the funds to cover these costs within the nominal fee charged for the course. Consideration of meeting T&S costs should be borne in mind prior to course application.
- 7.2. You should plan to conduct about 12 solo surveys at sites located within Surrey, or just over the county border with Surrey. Additionally, you will be required to attend the initial training day and a sand lizard burrow survey day.

## **8. Health and Safety**

- 8.1. Protocols in the [SARG Health and Safety Guide](#) should be followed.

## **9. Licensing**

- 9.1. In order to legally disturb rare reptile species whilst surveying, you will need to be covered by a Natural England licence. Following completion of your Initial Training Day, you will become an accredited agent on the SARG Reptile Licence such that you may conduct lawful surveys.

## **10. References**

- 10.1. The following references have assisted us in compiling this RRC syllabus.
  - Common Standards Monitoring Guidance for Reptiles and Amphibians - Version February 2004, JNCC
  - Froglife (1999) Froglife Advice Sheet 10: reptile survey Froglife, Halesworth.
  - Gent T and Gibson S (2003) Herpetofauna Workers Manual. JNCC, Peterborough. Herpetofauna Groups of Britain and Ireland (1998)
  - Latham DM, Jones E and Fasham M (2005) Reptiles in: Handbook of Biodiversity Methods: Survey, Evaluation and Monitoring, 403-411. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
  - CIEEM, Competencies for Species Survey: Reptiles. CIEEM & ARC Trust

## **11. Contact**

- 11.1. The SARG RRC course director is Jamel Guenioui.
- 11.2. Contact email: [Reptiles@surrey-arg.org.uk](mailto:Reptiles@surrey-arg.org.uk)