

## PROTOCOL FOR PARTICIPATING IN SAHG FIELD SURVEYS

### 1 Introduction

This protocol has been developed in order to assist field survey participants, especially families and younger members, in gaining positive experiences and education while participating in South Australian Herpetology Group (SAHG) camping trips and undertaking field activities.

SAHG field surveys often include the installation and checking of pitfall traps/lines and opportunistic searching. While undertaking these activities there is the potential for some members of the survey to miss out on instructions or education from the team leader or senior team members or opportunities to observe or handle fauna. There is also the potential for inexperienced survey participants to miss-handle fauna, endanger themselves or inadvertently cause environmental damage. Consequently this document seeks to provide guidance for all survey participants to minimise negative experiences and impacts.

### 2 Scope

This protocol applies to all SAHG members and associates participating in field survey, including those undertaken exclusively by SAHG or in conjunction with other organisations.

### 3 Background

The SAHG has an on-going role to further the knowledge of the distribution and status of reptiles and amphibians in South Australia. As a consequence the group undertakes a number of field trips each year to various locations around the state in order to search for animals and further our knowledge of their distribution.

In order to comply with relevant state legislation these surveys must be undertaken in accordance with the following documents:

- Wildlife Ethics Committee protocols and approvals
- Permit to Undertake Scientific Research
- *Guidelines for Vertebrate Surveys in South Australia using the Biological Survey of South Australia* by Helen Owens, et al. December 2000, Department for Environment and Heritage.

There is also a general requirement to undertake surveys in an environmentally responsible manner to minimise the impacts on the survey environment (native vegetation and fauna), and associated areas, including campsites, roads/ tracks & private property.

## 4 Protocols

### 4.1 General

#### Survey Leader

The survey leader is required to:

- Conduct a general briefing session about camp rules and the survey area prior to the commencement to the survey to ensure that all survey participants are aware of relevant information including:
  - Survey objectives
  - Any hazardous, restricted or 'no-go' areas (e.g. private property, sensitive sites, heritage sites, hazards)
  - Any hygiene or disease restriction protocols (e.g. prevention of the spread of Phytophthora, Mundulla Yellows)
  - Location of search areas
  - General timetable of activities
  - Emergency protocols
- Determine the 'make-up' of survey participants and where, required, allocate mentors (i.e. experienced members) to new or inexperienced survey participants.
- Encourage participants to ask questions and check references.
- Take into consideration the knowledge base of some of the newer participants when discussions take place in the camp or at survey sites as the knowledge of some participants may initially be limited. Where appropriate limit the use of jargon by using common names and descriptions (skink, gecko or dragon etc.) to help children. With common names and scientific names, participants can walk away with a basic knowledge which they can build on.
- Encourage inexperienced members to search for the scientific names of animals and plants in reference books or the internet to help them build up their knowledge base without feeling left out.
- Advise participants that they can request summaries of the field survey results and associated photos.

#### Survey Participants

Survey participants are required to:

- Comply with all reasonable directions from the survey leader(s).
- Behave in an orderly manner at all times.
- Ensure that all children are under the supervision of an adult at all times.
- Respect the property of others at all times, such as, that of the landowners and camping places and indigenous sites.
- Avoid entering any identified hazardous (e.g. unstable cliff edges, quarry faces, mine shafts, farm dams, stock watering sites), restricted or 'no-go' areas.
- Follow any precautions to prevent the spread of diseases or pathogens such as Phytophthora.
- Comply with safety requirements including avoiding leaving your group without notifying the field trip leader of your intended movements in time and place.
- Ensure that all rubbish is collected and taken home at the end of the trip.
- Minimise the environmental foot-print of activities.

## 4.2 Entering a Survey site

### Survey Leader

The survey leader is required to:

- Ensure that all participants are organised into groups and instructed to arrive at allocated site together before approaching pit and trap lines.
- Encourage new members to help actively and safely check traps by:
  - Discussing and explaining what **can** be seen.
  - Explaining what sometimes **can't** be seen (i.e. buried under the soil or hiding in toilet rolls such as small snakes, spiders, scorpions and other invertebrates).
  - Scratching around in buckets with safety equipment such as gloves and small snake hooks, etc.
  - Demonstrating, when retrieving captures and collecting invertebrates, how not to injure or loose specimens.
- Lead a discussion or debrief of specimens found and recorded.
- Determines specimens for SAM Vouchering and the release of captured fauna being returned at or near point of capture.

### Survey Participants

At the commencement of a survey participants are required to:

- Wait for all participants or pre-arranged groups to arrive at allocated site before approaching pit and trap lines. Be aware that there may be a need to check for additional opportunistic sightings in the location. Experienced members are requested to team-up with inexperienced participants.
- Ensure that children are in the care of parents or experienced members at all times while investigating any traps.
- Approach and check pit-lines and Elliott trap-lines as a group and follow pit-lines or Elliott numbers in sequence to ensure that no traps are missed.
- Stay on the defined tracks when entering survey areas or trap lines to minimize impacts to soil and vegetation.
- Actively and safely check traps by:
  - Looking for obvious captures
  - Carefully scratching around in buckets with safety equipment such as gloves and small snake hooks to locate any animals which may be hidden
  - Carefully retrieving captures and collecting invertebrates without injuring or losing specimens.

## 4.3 Opportunistic Searching or Spotlighting

### Survey Leader

When undertaking opportunistic searching or spotlighting the survey leader is required to:

- Explain to all participants to be mindful of the minimal impacts of walking around areas or excavating burrows (i.e. avoid stepping on small plants, sensitive habitats, digging up plants, etc.)
- Advise participants of which species are expected to be found (e.g. species likely to occur in the habitat, previously recorded species).

## Survey Participants

When undertaking opportunistic searching or spotlighting survey participants are required to:

- Notify field trip leaders prior to undertaking opportunistic searching or spotlighting.
- Record and take note of time spent at sites or location and on return, pass the information onto the designated leader for data records.
- When searching at sites or locations explain to all participants to be mindful of the minimal impacts of walking around areas (i.e. avoid stepping on small plants, sensitive habitats, etc.)
- Be aware of species that may be expected to be found (likely and previously recorded).

## **5 First Aid**

The major risks and hazards associated with field surveys are:

- Vehicle accident
- Sunburn
- Sprains & abrasions from falls, contact with vegetation etc
- Eye injury from vegetation
- Bites & stings from snakes, spiders, scorpions, centipedes, ticks, bees, wasps, mosquitoes & other insects
- Burns from stoves or fires

Field surveys can be conducted in locations that may be remote from medical & hospital help. It is recommended that all vehicles carry a suitable first aid kit. Both the Red Cross & St John Ambulance have websites that provide advice & both organisations can supply first aid books, training & first aid kits.

Hats should be worn & sunburn prevention cream used to prevent sunburn.

Fauna species are often encountered during survey work that can inflict bites and stings of varying severity. The major risk in Australia is from the bite of one of our dangerously venomous snakes. The risk of bite is minimised by:

- wearing long pants, &
- use of leather gloves

when performing field work. In particular gloves must be worn when checking traps, especially buckets.

Participants should have knowledge of snakebite first aid, in particular:

- an awareness of the signs & symptoms of snakebite
- being able to check if the victim is breathing & responsive
- reassuring the victim
- applying pressure immobilisation bandages to reduce venom circulation
- immobilising the victim to reduce venom circulation
- seeking immediate medical assistance

If bushwalking away from the trip leaders or other senior experienced persons, it is recommended that pressure immobilisation bandages are carried as a component of a first aid kit. No one should walk alone during field surveys.

## 6 Document Control

Rev	Author	Issue Date	Notes
1	P. Meegan	30.04.10	Draft for committee review
2	P. Matejcic	09.05.10	Inclusion of initial committee comments
3	Z. Bowen	30.05.10	Document re-formatting & addition of info
4	SAHG Committee	01.06.10	Amendments and Accepted
5	I. Williams	12.09.11	First aid information & minor text changes