



Attending Public Events

April 2016

Background

Many Amphibian and Reptile Groups (ARGs) attend, or run public events and/or educational and training sessions for ARG volunteers and the wider public. This advice note provides some suggestions for exhibiting at public facing events, based on the experiences of the groups.

Sometimes live animals are taken to public events, in which case their welfare must be given due consideration. In order to minimise any harmful impacts on the animals, whilst still allowing volunteers and the wider public to engage and interact with them for educational purposes, we have also included some general guidelines about this aspect.



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Public Events

1. Insurance and risk assessments:

- Before participating in any event you should first ensure that public liability insurance and risk assessments are in place. You may also need to provide a copy of your group's insurance to the event organisers. These should also cover live animals, if these are to be brought to the event, and the event's organisers should be made aware of this in advance.
- All affiliated ARGs are covered by the ARG UK umbrella insurance (which you can obtain by emailing info@arguk.org), and all supporting documents including: ARG UK insurance Advice Note 3, volunteer agreements and blank risk assessments can be downloaded from www.arguk.org.

2. Location of the stand:

- Find out in advance where your stand or stall will be situated.
- If you are taking a lot of equipment with you then make sure that you can access the site/stand with a vehicle.

3. Resources for your stand:

- Ensure that you have sufficient leaflets, fliers and other information to engage the public. Will the stand be themed? Depending on the nature of the public event you may wish to focus on a specific point, e.g. gardening for wildlife, amphibian and reptile recording, dogs and adders etc.
- If you are taking a laptop e.g. to demonstrate recording, check that you will have a power supply or sufficient battery and/or Wi-Fi. Secure any trailing cables, which may be a trip hazard.



- Decide whether you are taking live animals – or other materials (e.g. models, snake sloughs etc.).
- Find out whether tables will be provided to put the tanks and vivaria on, so that they can be easily viewed.
- Will there be chairs, or do you need to take your own (in which case it is worth investing in some folding chairs)?
- If you are to be outside, will there be any shade? If not, take a gazebo to provide protection for humans and animals. Some ARGs have invested in tailor-made gazebos that form a part of their display.

4. Running the stand on the day:

- Ensure that you have sufficient volunteers to cover the stand for the duration, including set up and break down, so that helpers can be rotated. Live animals should never be left unattended, but human helpers also need breaks.
- It is also helpful to have a few more experienced volunteers on hand to answer more complex questions.

5. Fundraising, and collecting records and other information:

Attending public events can be a great way of collecting records. People visiting your stand may want to tell you about the amphibians and/or reptiles they have seen, and this kind of interaction can be turned into useful site records.

- Clarify why you are collecting the records and what they will be used for. If possible, demonstrate your record collecting sheets/database e.g. Record Pool, to encourage people to continue to log their records in the future.
- If you are soliciting donations or gathering personal information (e.g. as part of record collection) then you will need to adhere to recommended best practices for fundraising. For more information you can download the 'Code of Fundraising Practice' and 'Data protection' from the Institute of Fundraising (www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk).
- Never leave any personal details (e.g. names and contact information of those submitting records) unattended in a public space.

6. Live Animal Exhibits:

There are diverse views (including among ARGs) on the use of live animals as exhibits at public events. On the one hand close inspection, or even handling, of a live animal can have a strong, positive impact, on the other the animals in question undoubtedly experience a degree of stress. Each ARG must come to its own decisions on how to reconcile these issues and whether or not they will use live animals in exhibits. This activity was the subject of a workshop at the 2014 Herpetofauna Workers Meeting and the issues raised there are summarised below:

6.1 The first question to ask is: Do you need to take live animals to an event?

- Do the educational advantages of presentation of live specimens outweigh the stress likely to be caused to the individual animals involved?
- Could effective alternatives be used, such as models/literature/sloughs/photographs?

- Does the use of animal exhibits give the appropriate messages to the public? Wild animals in display containers may give the impression that they are suitable as pets.

6.2 Which species are suitable to take to public events?

For an ARG that opts to display live animals, then some species appear to cope better with being taken to events and with public interactions, particularly handling, than others.

- ✓ slow-worm (can be handled by the public under supervision)
- ✓ juvenile grass snake (can be handled by the public under supervision, but may emit a foul smelling musk)

Some animals appear to cope with being taken to an event, but may become stressed if handled; are more likely to escape, or are otherwise unsuitable for handling, so should be for viewing only. These include:

- newts (assuming that necessary licenses are in place if great crested newts are present)
- common frog: adults, tadpoles and spawn
- common toad: adults, tadpoles and spawn
- natterjack toad (assuming that necessary licenses are in place)
- sand lizard (assuming that necessary licenses are in place)
- viviparous lizard
- adult grass snake
- smooth snake (assuming that necessary licenses are in place)

We recommend that in general, adders are not suitable as live exhibits at public events due to the increased burden of managing a potentially dangerous wild animal. Obstacles include liability, legal compliance and rigorous risk management procedures.

You should never take a venomous snake, such as an adder, to a public event without first securing the permission of the event's organisers.

6.3 Animal welfare

Welfare considerations are a priority. If it is too hot/cold, or too busy and the animals appear to be stressed, then remove them from the stand to a quiet, shaded and secure place. In addition:

- Aim to get the balance between people being able to see the animals, and the animals feeling secure and having their basic needs met.
- Ensure that the animals are suitably housed when they are being displayed (or held elsewhere), with regard to shade, temperature and provision of suitable terrestrial and aquatic habitat e.g. moss ball, bark slab, deep litter. Provide a bowl of clean water for terrestrial animals, and for aquatic creatures bring water from the original water source that you found the animal in (animals can be transported in minimal water to stop it sloshing about, and additional water transported in closed containers).
- Tanks and vivaria must have secure lids, so that animals cannot escape, or be accessed by the public.
- It is important to explain to the public that you should not keep native reptiles and amphibians as pets. It should also be communicated that the animals are 'borrowed from the wild', and that they are not-long term pets and are always returned to their precise location of capture within 24 hours.

- Carefully worded labels on display cages may help to reinforce the previous point.
- Do not over-handle animals: if the public, particularly smaller children, are handling animals monitor this closely, to ensure they are not handled roughly. Individual animals should also be rested, so we advise either handling at set times (i.e. at publicised hourly intervals), rotating the animals being handled, or only allowing handling by the ARG volunteers.
- Do not allow very small children (under five years), to handle live animals.
- Return wild animals to the place you got them from as soon as possible after the event, and no more than 24 hours later.
- Wild amphibians and reptiles should not be used for public display during the winter when they would otherwise be hibernating.

6.4 Public health

The risk of transfer of disease from wild amphibians and reptiles to humans is relatively low. Nevertheless, wild reptiles may carry *Salmonella*, and pond water in which amphibians are kept may contain a range of potential pathogens.

- Ensure that anyone handling animals or pond water is informed of the potential disease risks and of hygiene measures.
- Provide a pump style anti-bacterial gel dispenser on the stand so that the public/volunteers can clean their hands after handling.
- Dissuade those who are likely to be more susceptible to disease e.g. very young children, the elderly or visibly infirm, from handling animals.

6.5 Biosecurity

Consistent with our concerns for biosecurity (ARG Advice Note 4):

- Wild animals from different sites should not be housed together, or handled consecutively without observing biosecurity precautions (gloves and hand-wash).

It is also possible that disease among amphibians and, potentially, reptiles can be passed from captive stock to wild animals.

- Wild animals should not be housed or displayed alongside pet amphibians or reptiles either after capture, at the event, or prior to release.
- Nets, containers and equipment used for captive animals should not be used for wild animals, unless thoroughly disinfected.

6.6 Other practical considerations

If you are taking live animals to a public event then the location of your stand can be critically important.

- Ensure that there will be somewhere shaded, cool, quiet and secure for the animals to rest.
- Check that you can access the site/stand with a vehicle to avoid having to carry animal and water containers over long distances.

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