



## MENTORS, REGIONAL CO-ORDINATORS and AREA ORGANISERS

### SOME GUIDANCE NOTES

Since the start of co-ordinated recording in 1987, the BAS has had Area Organisers (AOs) as a crucial element of the quality-control process within the Spider Recording Scheme (SRS). More recently we introduced the Mentor Scheme, which aimed to assist new members of the Society get to grips with finding and identifying species by putting them in touch with a more experienced member. More recently still, and as part of our Growth Strategy, the idea of Regional Co-ordinators has developed. These three activities allow members who have the inclination and time to contribute in important ways to the general aims of the BAS.

Here we have collated what the BAS regards as the broad remit of each position so that interested members are aware of what, in general, they are expected to do when considering whether to take on one (or more) roles. We do understand that, as volunteers, not everyone will be able or willing to embrace all aspects of the outlines below.

### MENTORS

#### Aims

The overall objective of the Mentoring Scheme is to provide support, encouragement and guidance to members, particularly to those new to the Society, in order to develop their interest in arachnology.

There is some evidence that, in the past, new members in particular have found it difficult to become involved in BAS activities and have lacked sufficient support and encouragement to continue doing so. We hope that by providing members with a named contact within the Society who is prepared to assist them in developing their interest and knowledge, this will develop their confidence and enable them to contribute positively in the Society's affairs as well as to arachnology in general.

#### Scope

It is envisaged that support to members could be provided in four main areas, though such help will inevitably depend on the particular skills and interests of the mentor. The following suggestions are not intended to be prescriptive:

- a) **Identification skills.** Help with learning to identify spiders and other arachnids can come in a number of different forms. The most basic will be checking the member's own identifications to allow them to build up a reference collection for future use. Others will include information on use of keys (e.g. the BAS linyphiid key, difficult species guides), where to find particular species and genera in the standard reference works and hints on how to orient specimens under the microscope in order to see properly, the key characters. The aim should be to encourage members to provide them with the confidence to identify their own specimens, while warning them of the pitfalls inherent in the identification of critical species or genera.
- b) **Information on activities** that may be of interest and relevance to the member. This could include information on identification courses, meetings, field days and the SRS; whether these are run under the auspices of the BAS or other organisations. The aim should be to strongly encourage the member to participate in events that are appropriate to their interests and level of knowledge.

- c) **Information on equipment** and supplies that members may need, where to obtain them and how best to use them.
- d) **Accessing information** (whether printed, electronic or other) of relevance to the member. This could include, for example, information on availability of useful books, papers or web-sites relating to spiders and other arachnids, supplying names and contact details of experts in particular groups or supplying information on sites of particular interest in the member's area.

This list is by no means exhaustive. Some members may have particular interests, such as photography or rearing them in captivity. Unless the mentor shares that particular interest, it will probably be most appropriate to refer them to another member of the Society who has the particular expertise required.

It should be noted that, although help with identification overlaps to some extent with one of the key roles of AOs within the SRS, the aim here is a different one. The role of AOs is essentially to ensure that records provided to the SRS database are correct. The role of mentors in this case is to encourage and assist BAS members (new or otherwise) in developing their identification and other skills. Thus these roles should be seen as complementing each other rather than conflicting. Some individuals may wish to combine both AO and mentoring roles.

### **Making contact with members**

As a nominated mentor, the membership treasurer will inform you of new members in your area and provide you with their address(es), e-mail details and telephone numbers as well as providing your contact details to the new member. You are **strongly encouraged** to contact every new member **by telephone to welcome them to the Society**, to try to find out the nature and extent of their interests and to discuss with them what type of help you can provide. The aim will be to develop a continuing relationship with the member to provide ongoing support for their interest in our field.

The mentoring programme is also available to existing members for whom the national contact point is the Society's secretary. Once a member contacts him, he will ensure their details are passed to the appropriate mentor for that area so that they can get in touch with the member concerned.

Whether or not you as a mentor meet up with a particular member will depend on whether the member wishes to do so and how close or distant their home is. Because at present there are relatively few mentors, it may be that you will be a mentor for members from a distant area and it would be quite impractical to meet. However, bear in mind that personal contact, through field days or other meetings, can often be a very effective stimulus to people who are starting in a new field and if the opportunity to make that contact arises you should encourage the member to do so.

### **REGIONAL CO-ORDINATORS**

Regional Co-ordinators (RCs), are a new venture for the BAS. The broad remit of the RC's role is to:

- a) **Promote the work of the BAS** and through this, enhance general interest in arachnids and increase membership of the Society by attending regional events, shows, open days etc. and/ or encouraging and enabling others to do so. We are building up experience of how best to present the Society and are also developing a range of materials such as simple handouts for children and their parents, that can be used on these occasions. There may be other opportunities to promote knowledge of spiders (and the BAS) in local newspapers, magazines etc.
- b) **Organisation of field activities.** Many BAS members, especially new ones, are unsure about how to start collecting spiders. One or two annual field meetings organised by the RC would provide excellent opportunities for new members to meet other enthusiasts of varying experience, learn sometimes idiosyncratic field techniques and generally have an enjoyable, sociable and profitable day out.

It is unlikely that we will find enough RCs to cover the whole of Britain, but some will certainly be better than none. The RC activity could, if members have sufficient time and enthusiasm, be combined with mentoring and/ or AO roles.

There are also opportunities for others, who do not wish to take on a formal role, to contribute time and skills to help with stalls, presentation, organisation, etc. in support of their local RC.

## AREA ORGANISERS

The Recording Scheme's idea of the role of an 'ideal' AO is to:

- a) Collate all county records and generate feedback for all their local active recorders by keeping them up-to-date with the current status of species in the county.
- b) Verify and validate records for the county, recognising the local significance of records and sending specimens to national experts whenever necessary – it is not essential that County Recorders are themselves 'experts' but should be able to refer material to national referees prepared to provide an opinion reasonably quickly.
- c) Maintain a database of county records, preferably on computer and in a form which allows ready exchange of data.
- d) Pass data on to the SRS, check nationally produced maps and liaise with Local Record Centres to enable an exchange of verified data which can enter a national database managed by the national recording scheme.

In addition to the above points, the AO should aim to publish (as a minimum) a short note in the SRS News on the spider recording undertaken within their vice-county/counties on a regular basis (at least biannually), with information on the notable species recorded. This should ensure that all members are kept up-to-date with recording effort. This will highlight to new members the type of activity undertaken within their region and encourage active participation in the forthcoming year.

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