



## **Animal Welfare Policy**

**The Sussex Reptile Rescue Centre**  
**Registered Charity (CIO): 1210189**

**Policy owner:** Board of Trustees

**Applies to:** Trustees, staff, volunteers, foster carers and anyone acting on behalf of the charity

**Review frequency:** At least annually, or sooner following significant changes in legislation, operations or recognised animal-welfare practice.

### **1. Purpose**

The Sussex Reptile Rescue Centre (SRRC) is committed to safeguarding the health, welfare and quality of life of every animal in our care.

This policy establishes the principles and minimum standards governing the rescue, intake, housing, husbandry, handling, veterinary treatment, rehabilitation, transport, rehoming and, where applicable, permanent care of reptiles and other animals for which the charity assumes responsibility.

Animal welfare will take priority over convenience, financial considerations, educational opportunities, publicity or other operational objectives.

### **2. Our Welfare Commitment**

SRRC aims to provide every animal with an environment and standard of care appropriate to its species, age, size, health, behavioural needs and individual circumstances.

We will seek to ensure that animals:

- have access to appropriate food and fresh water;
- are housed in a suitable environment;
- are provided with appropriate temperatures, humidity, lighting and ventilation;
- have sufficient space and appropriate environmental complexity;
- can express normal and species-appropriate behaviours;
- are protected from unnecessary pain, suffering, injury and disease;
- receive appropriate veterinary attention when required;
- are handled and transported in ways designed to minimise unnecessary stress;
- are protected from inappropriate interactions with people or other animals; and



- are only rehomed where SRRC is satisfied that appropriate long-term care can reasonably be provided.

### **3. Legal Responsibilities**

SRRC will seek to comply with all animal-welfare legislation and regulatory requirements applicable to its activities.

This includes, where relevant, the **Animal Welfare Act 2006**, under which persons responsible for animals have a duty to take reasonable steps to meet their welfare needs.

Where an activity requires a licence, permission or other regulatory approval, SRRC will not knowingly undertake that activity without the necessary authorisation.

The charity will cooperate appropriately with veterinary surgeons, local authorities and other competent authorities in matters concerning animal welfare.

### **4. Welfare Assessment**

Welfare decisions will be made on an individual-animal basis wherever practicable.

Assessment may consider:

- physical health and body condition;
- appetite and hydration;
- mobility;
- behaviour and temperament;
- signs of pain, illness or injury;
- shedding and skin condition;
- faecal and urate output;
- environmental requirements;
- stress-related behaviour;
- reproductive health;
- previous husbandry and medical history; and
- any additional species-specific considerations.

Where there are concerns about an animal's health or welfare, appropriate action will be taken and veterinary advice obtained when necessary.



## **5. Intake and Initial Assessment**

Animals entering SRRC's care should receive an initial assessment as soon as reasonably practicable.

Available information concerning the animal should be recorded, including where known:

- species;
- sex;
- approximate age;
- weight and/or size;
- previous diet;
- previous housing conditions;
- medical history;
- medication;
- known behavioural concerns;
- feeding history;
- origin and ownership information; and
- reason for surrender or rescue.

Where information is unavailable, this should be recorded rather than assumed.

Animals presenting with urgent health concerns will be prioritised for appropriate veterinary assessment.

## **6. Quarantine and Biosecurity**

Newly admitted animals will normally be subject to an appropriate quarantine procedure in accordance with SRRC's biosecurity and disease-control procedures.

Quarantine arrangements should minimise the risk of infectious or parasitic disease spreading between animals.

Appropriate hygiene measures may include:

- dedicated equipment;
- appropriate personal protective equipment;
- hand washing and disinfection;
- separation of animals;
- cleaning and disinfection protocols;



- appropriate waste disposal; and
- monitoring for signs of disease.

Suspected infectious disease will be managed appropriately and veterinary advice obtained where necessary.

## **7. Housing and Environmental Conditions**

Enclosures must be appropriate for the species and individual animal concerned.

Consideration will be given to:

- enclosure dimensions;
- temperature gradients;
- heating;
- UVB and other lighting requirements;
- humidity;
- ventilation;
- substrate;
- hides and refuges;
- climbing opportunities;
- water provision;
- bathing requirements;
- environmental enrichment;
- security and escape prevention; and
- opportunities to perform species-appropriate behaviours.

Environmental conditions should be monitored at appropriate intervals and equipment maintained in safe working order.

Animals will not routinely be housed together where doing so creates an unacceptable risk of aggression, competition, injury, inappropriate breeding, disease transmission or chronic stress.



## **8. Feeding and Nutrition**

Animals will receive diets appropriate to their species, life stage, size, health and individual requirements.

Feeding regimes will take account of recognised husbandry practice and veterinary advice where appropriate.

Food will be stored and prepared hygienically. Supplements will be provided where appropriate.

Animals showing significant changes in appetite, feeding behaviour, body condition or weight will be monitored and investigated as appropriate.

Fresh drinking water will be available according to the biological requirements of the species concerned.

## **9. Handling**

Handling will be undertaken only where there is a legitimate welfare, husbandry, veterinary, transport, educational or operational reason.

Animals will not be deliberately provoked, distressed or placed in inappropriate situations for entertainment, publicity, photography, video content or social-media engagement.

Handling methods must take account of the animal's species, size, temperament and physical condition as well as the competence of the handler.

Appropriate equipment and additional personnel should be used where necessary.

## **10. Veterinary Care**

SRRC recognises the importance of professional veterinary involvement in maintaining animal welfare.

Animals requiring veterinary assessment or treatment will be referred to an appropriately competent veterinary practice when necessary.

Prescribed medication will be administered in accordance with veterinary instructions.

Treatment decisions will be based primarily upon the welfare interests of the animal.

Relevant veterinary records, medication information and treatment histories should be retained appropriately.



### **11. Pain, Suffering and Emergencies**

Unnecessary pain, suffering or distress will not be permitted.

Where an animal is seriously ill or injured, appropriate action will be taken without unnecessary delay.

Emergency arrangements should enable responsible persons to obtain veterinary assistance when required.

Where immediate veterinary treatment cannot reasonably be obtained, appropriate professional advice should be sought wherever possible.

### **12. Euthanasia and End-of-Life Decisions**

There may be circumstances where euthanasia is the most humane option for an animal experiencing serious or irreversible suffering.

Such decisions should be made in consultation with a veterinary surgeon wherever reasonably practicable.

Euthanasia will never be undertaken simply because an animal has become inconvenient, difficult to rehome or expensive to maintain.

The welfare and quality of life of the individual animal will remain the primary consideration.

### **13. Rehabilitation and Rehoming**

Where appropriate, SRRC will seek to rehabilitate rescued animals before rehoming them.

Animals will not knowingly be rehomed where SRRC considers the proposed environment or prospective keeper incapable of meeting their reasonable welfare requirements.

Rehoming assessments may consider:

- the keeper's knowledge and experience;
- proposed enclosure;
- heating and lighting;
- diet;
- available space;
- financial ability to provide appropriate ongoing care;
- veterinary provision;
- existing animals;



- household circumstances; and
- any species-specific requirements.

SRRC reserves the right to decline a rehoming application where there are reasonable welfare concerns.

#### **14. Ambassador and Permanent-Resident Animals**

Not every animal entering SRRC's care will necessarily be suitable for rehoming.

An animal may remain permanently within the charity's care where this is considered appropriate because of its health, history, behaviour, welfare requirements or suitability as an ambassador animal.

Ambassador animals may participate in appropriately managed educational activities, but their welfare remains paramount.

No animal will be required to participate in an educational session, public event, photography session or other activity where there are reasonable indications that participation would cause inappropriate stress or compromise its welfare.

Animals should have appropriate rest periods and opportunities to withdraw from public interaction.

#### **15. Education and Public Events**

Where animals participate in educational or outreach activities, SRRC will take reasonable measures to protect both animal welfare and public safety.

The number, duration and frequency of interactions will be appropriately controlled.

Members of the public will only be permitted to interact with animals where this is considered safe and appropriate.

Animals will not be treated as props or entertainment.

An animal may be withdrawn from an activity at any time because of behavioural, environmental, health or welfare concerns.

#### **16. Transport**

Animals will be transported using secure, appropriately sized and species-suitable containers.

Transport arrangements should minimise:

- escape risk;
- excessive temperature fluctuations;
- injury;
- unnecessary handling;
- excessive journey duration; and



- avoidable stress.

Additional temperature-control measures will be used where environmental conditions make these necessary.

### **17. Dangerous or Higher-Risk Animals**

Where SRRC is legally permitted to care for animals presenting additional risks, enhanced procedures will apply.

Risk assessments, secure accommodation, appropriate equipment, competent personnel and emergency procedures must be in place according to the nature of the risk.

Where an animal falls within legislation requiring a licence or specific authorisation, the charity will obtain the necessary authority before keeping the animal where legally required.

Human safety and animal welfare should be considered together when determining appropriate management arrangements.

### **18. Record Keeping**

Appropriate records should be maintained for animals in SRRC's care.

Depending upon the circumstances, these may include:

- intake information;
- identification details;
- weights;
- feeding records;
- health observations;
- veterinary records;
- medication;
- shedding;
- behavioural observations;
- transfers;
- rehoming information; and
- deaths.

Records should be sufficiently detailed to support continuity of care.



## **19. Training and Competence**

Persons undertaking animal-care activities must be appropriately competent for the duties assigned to them.

SRRC will encourage continuing professional development and ongoing learning in reptile husbandry, animal welfare, biosecurity, handling and related areas.

Individuals must not undertake procedures or handle animals beyond their level of competence without appropriate supervision.

## **20. Reporting Welfare Concerns**

Trustees, volunteers and other persons working with SRRC are expected to report animal-welfare concerns promptly.

Concerns should normally be reported to the Operations Manager or another appropriate senior person.

Where the concern relates to that individual, it should be raised directly with the Board of Trustees.

No person should be disadvantaged for raising a genuine animal-welfare concern in good faith.

Serious concerns will be investigated and, where appropriate, referred to a veterinary surgeon, regulator or other competent authority.

## **21. Welfare Takes Priority**

SRRC recognises that circumstances may arise where animal welfare conflicts with fundraising, educational, operational or publicity objectives.

In such circumstances, the welfare needs of the animal will take priority.

No animal should be subjected to unnecessary distress simply to facilitate photographs, social-media content, visitor interaction, fundraising or educational activities.

## **22. Responsibility**

Overall responsibility for governance of animal welfare rests with the Board of Trustees.

Day-to-day responsibility for implementing appropriate animal-care procedures may be delegated to the Operations Manager and other suitably competent persons.

Every person working with animals on behalf of SRRC nevertheless has an individual responsibility to protect their welfare and to raise concerns where appropriate.



### **23. Related Policies and Procedures**

This policy should be read alongside relevant SRRC policies and procedures, including:

- Biosecurity and Disease Control Procedures;
- Feeding and Cleaning SOPs;
- Animal Transport Procedures;
- Monitoring Animal Health Procedures;
- Death and Escape Procedures;
- Escape Policy;
- Training Policy;
- Safeguarding Policy;
- Health and Safety Policy;
- Risk Assessments; and
- Ambassador Animal Policy.

### **24. Policy Review**

The Board of Trustees will review this policy at least annually and following any significant:

- animal-welfare incident;
- change in legislation or licensing requirements;
- change to the charity's activities or premises;
- introduction of substantially different species or activities; or
- professional or regulatory recommendation.