

The Wildlife Society – Western Section

Mohave Ground Squirrel Workshop

Evaluations and Discussion

The MGS Workshop was a resounding success! 64 participants (from consulting firms, resource agencies, universities and other affiliations) attended lectures and a field site April 16-17, 2005 in Ridgecrest. Doctors Phil Leitner, John Harris and Tony Recht led the discussions, with additional presentations from Jeff Aardahl (BLM), Becky Jones (CDFG), and Kayce Bell (Idaho State Univ.). Mark Hagan and Kathy Buescher-Simon were our field instructors (in addition to Dr. Harris). Thanks to all of those folks in addition to a number of volunteers who helped this event take place with enormous success (most notably Steve Juarez and Julie Vance of CDFG).

The summary presented below includes ratings (on a 1-5 scale, with 5 highest or best, 1 lowest or worst unless otherwise indicated), selected comments from participants*, and responses from TWS-West and the Professional Development Committee (*Not censorship, I'll include all the negative stuff, but won't necessarily include remarkably repetitive comments).

A total of 29 evaluations (41% of participants) were received and are summarized here. N=sample size (i.e. number of responses), R=Range of ratings, X=Average of ratings.

- 1.) To what extent were your personal/professional objectives satisfied? N=29, R=3-5, X=**4.48**
- 2.) To what extent did the classroom environment contribute to the learning experience? N=29, R=2-5, X=**4.29**
- 3.) To what extent did the course materials contribute to the learning experience? N=29, R=3-5, X=**4.64**
- 4.) To what extent were the objectives stated in the promotional literature or those stated at the beginning of the workshop satisfied? N=28, R=4-5, X=**4.68**
- 5.) In what ways did the instructors excel? (No numeric ratings requested)
- 6.) To what extent did the workshop contain significant and current intellectual or practical information? N=29, R=3-5, X=**4.71**
- 7.) Did the field site visit accomplish your objectives? N=28, R=2-5, X=**4.57**
- 8.) How would you rate the registration fees for the workshop? (5=Too High, 1=Too low) N=27, R=2-5, X=**3.67**

Response: Overall, it's clear that the large majority of participants approved of all aspects of the workshop, with a "B-plus" or perhaps "A-minus" in every category. For Number 8 (registration fees for the workshop), we aim for a 3.0 or "about right."

1.) To what were your personal/professional objectives satisfied?

- We should have had more time in the field
- Need to incorporate a MGS handling course for CDFG Trapping Approval
- Would have liked a bit more field time
- I thought the workshop was very thorough, especially for only being 2 days long!
- Would have been nice to have some sort of certification result from this workshop
- Could have used more detail on trapping and data collection
- Not enough on how one can become an approved biologist by CDFG; Number of hours required, how we can become more involved

Response: On the most significant question, which is stated in several ways throughout the evaluations, see our lengthy response after #11. Refer to #7 for more discussion of the field component.

2.) To what extent did the classroom environment contribute to the learning experience?

- The classroom configuration was great for seeing the PowerPoints
- The class set-up was very good. Plenty of room, comfort and even in the back I could hear everyone fine.
- PowerPoints were a little boring in presentation, but very informative
- A little warm and too dark
- I liked the seating, much better than a conference room. Lighting for notes could have been improved
- Good auditorium, a little warm
- Too hot

Response: I've already talked to the site hosts about the room temperature; unfortunately, "the computer" was programmed to prevent operation of the air conditioning on weekends. With the back doors open, circulation improved, however we apologize for the warm room temperature.

Lighting – also an issue which we tried to resolve, but we weren't happy with it, either.

3.) To what extent did the course materials contribute to the learning experience?

- It would have been nice to have maps large and clear enough to identify locations and all of the info. Half of the info couldn't be seen on copies in the notebooks.
- Would have liked more notes from Tony Recht
- Would have appreciated a contact list for attendees
- CD was an excellent idea
- I particularly like having the hard copy of the ppt presentations for later review

- Very informative on a broad range of topics
- More on survey methodology to use for DFG/CEQA/2081

Response: Glad you liked the CD's (which include much of the background information), we'll do that again. We'll let Tony know that more notes would be appreciated; he was added to the program rather late in the planning. As for a list of attendees, that's a two-edged sword: We don't distribute personal information of members and participants without their specific permission. We did include contact information for instructors, and there was a half-page of blank space for participants to collect e-mail addresses of other attendees. Contact the instructors; I'm confident that they will be glad to provide larger maps upon request.

4.) To what extent were the objectives stated in the promotional literature of those stated at the beginning of the workshop satisfied?

- Everything was very informative

5.) In what ways did the instructors excel?

- It was obvious they all have extensive experience with MGS, AGS, etc.
- Dr. Recht was very informative
- Tony Recht, I liked how he incorporated the friendliness of the squirrels with himself and brought some laughter and entertainment to his lecture
- Knowledge base, willingness to share, hear thoughts, discussion, experience, friendliness
- Phil and Tony were excellent. All other speakers were of a high quality and offered knowledge about the MGS
- Knowing a great deal and being flexible and taking lots of questions and being passionate!
- Well-versed, Always made time for questions
- All were very knowledgeable and approachable
- Tony Recht was the most interesting and captivating speaker

6.) To what extent did the workshop contain significant and current intellectual or practical information?

- Glad so many with field experience presented info, whether as speaker or from audience
- Could have discussed issues and challenges with trapping protocol
- There weren't many times where a speaker was wrong, though when there was, others were very helpful and informative
- Excellent!
- I feel like I am up to date
- Thanks for the current info on genetics, management, etc.

7.) Did the field site visit accomplish your objectives?

- I wasn't sure what to expect, but I did expect more out of the field visit
- Wonderful experience, John Harris was great

- A bit rushed, but good
- 3 MGS!
- It was neat to see AGS as compared to MGS
- I got a good feel for MGS habitat and had a chance to get a good look at one
- Enjoyed the field experience. Liked seeing the species in high-quality habitat as well as seeing & discussing trapping & detection methods.
- Not enough insight on identifying active (suitable) burrows vs. non-active (non-suitable) burrows. Examples of ideal habitat vs. non-suitable habitat

Response: Length of the field trip is a delicate balance, between logistics and equal value for all participants. We've already discussed a few ways we might change it next time (perhaps decreasing the amount of time spent on radio telemetry, as one example; an earlier start time or a different meeting location could also increase the amount of field time). We're VERY happy that every participant in both field sessions saw an MGS. A few people commented about how we shouldn't do workshops in the spring, because we biologists are too busy, but seeing MGS was clearly an objective of this workshop, if we'd done it in another season, that likely wouldn't have happened!

8.) How would you rate the registration fees for the workshop?

- The price wouldn't be bad at all had we spent more time in the field, and had a little more of a hands-on experience
- Maybe a little high
- Cost of workshop was fair. I appreciated having the meals included (a very nice perk)
- My company paid so it seemed fair
- Should set up block rooms at Quality or Best Western for discounts to attendees. Better describe the hotel choices (Econo Inn and Suites was a dump!)

Response: Because this was the first time we offered this workshop, I'll admit that we had a slightly higher than normal tuition – that's simply a "supply and demand" kind of thing. We included meals primarily due to the location, it would have been difficult for participants to get to lunch and back in less than 60 or even 90 minutes. TWS-West would like to thank all of our sponsors for helping with the refreshments and meals.

We didn't arrange a room block because, with the relatively low number of participants, it would be difficult to predict how many people would be local residents, how many would travel, and how many would opt to stay at lower cost lodging. Room blocks have liability attached, if rooms stay empty, TWS still pays for them. We did include a list of hotels in several price ranges, which may compensate for the higher registration cost. The list of hotels was provided by the Ridgecrest Visitor's Bureau, and all listed hotels were also members of the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce, which we think typically ensures reputable quality in relation to cost, however, we will provide the comment on one particular site to both of those organizations.

9.) I would suggest the following topics for future workshops/conferences

- Handling MGS
- Habitat Conservation Planning and Management
- Wildlife Movement Studies
- Effects of roads on the ecosystem
- Studying and designing effective wildlife undercrossings
- Elk
- BNLL, please (Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard)
- SKR and SBKR (Stephens and San Bernardino Kangaroo Rats); identification, permits, biology, etc.
- TWS Certification Workshop in Central or Northern Calif., or have it the day before the TWS Western Section Meeting
- T&E invertebrates (i.e. Quino Checkerspot Butterfly, Delhi Sands Flower-loving Fly, longhorn beetle, etc.)
- Burrowing Owl. The Western Riverside MSHCP requires surveys for this species on many properties
- Protocol development for wildlife in general
- Various marking methods and devices
- Invertebrates of any kind
- A workshop on land trusts, mitigation banks, conservation easements...when to use them, how to use them. Are they a good idea biologically?

Response: Some excellent ideas! Handling MGS – see response after #11. Look for Habitat Conservation Planning soon and Section 7 Consultation next spring. We’re considering a workshop similar to 2003’s So Cal Sensitive Reptiles and Amphibians in a few years. We probably won’t do too many species-specific workshops (BNLL or others), though we are thinking about Arroyo Southwestern Toads. PDC will gladly discuss additional Certification Workshops, and one next February is certainly possible. Contact your Chapter Rep or officers to see if they’d like to help organize a certification workshop. Our Burrowing Owl Symposium in 2003 was a great success; we’re seriously considering “Part Two.” A few “bird techniques” some technical workshops on statistical methods and remote cameras are in our plans. Invertebrates? Maybe, but check for that kind of thing with organizations such as UC Extension and UC Riverside.

10.) How did you find out about the workshop?

- Becky Jones told us about it.
- TWS Website
- Employer
- Friend
- At the Desert Tortoise Handling Workshop
- Flyer
- Fellow consultants at my firm
- Announcement at TWS Western Section meeting in January

11.) **Anything else you'd like to say?**

- This was my third TWS event and was of the same high quality as the other events
- Thanks for feeding us the whole weekend. Pizza was a fantastic idea!
- Nice table with goodies to buy (I love the t-shirt!)
- Workshops should be held during the work week, not on weekends!
- On Sunday, start earlier (7 a.m.) so we can head home earlier, being that Monday is a workday...we're all here anyway!

Response: Thanks to HT Harvey and Associates for their sponsorship of the pizza night. Stevan Logsdon was also happy with the T-shirt and his sales (by the way, he will sell more via mail, \$20 each including shipping, call him at (505) 388-4263).

Weekend vs. work week is always a challenge; we'll get comments either way. For that reason, we do some each way. The Bat Symposium in October will start on Monday and conclude on Wednesday. In this case, our lecture facility (Cerro Coso Community College) wasn't available during the week, but we decided to do this workshop on a weekend for several reasons, including instructor and volunteer availability. We'll continue to mix it up...

The big question...

Many participants believed that this workshop should have included knowledge and experience directly related to obtaining an MOU or handling permit for Mohave Ground Squirrels. This comment was included on about 15 evaluations, in one way or another. Several comments were received stating that we should have allowed participants to handle MGS.

Response: Simply said, this was never our intent. It's far, far, far beyond the abilities and interests of TWS West, an organization aimed at improving communication and continuing education of professional biologists and students, to even attempt to fill the authority and responsibilities of the California Department of Fish and Game. Our promotional literature and website included the following statement:

Important Note: This workshop is not intended to provide training or experience toward obtaining any permit or authorization to trap, handle, harass, or survey for the Mohave Ground Squirrel.

Handling of MGS is of course strictly controlled activity. We never even considered allowing inexperienced and non-permitted individuals to handle the species, which would have been a blatant violation of state law.

We understand that MGS permits and MOUs are somewhat of a Catch-22 – you can't get a permit without handling experience and you can't get handling experience without a permit, but again, that's beyond the authority of TWS West. TWS West will not be able

to provide any workshop including handling or trapping of MGS by untrained participants, it's just not possible.