

Health and Safety Information

The following information provides notes on good practice when undertaking fieldwork. The notes should be helpful to you but the actions outlined are not compulsory.

As a volunteer you are under no obligation to participate in the survey or monitoring programme and you can cease taking part in the survey at any point. You are responsible for your own health and safety and should never put yourself or others in a position that could be dangerous. If at any point you have concerns about your own health and safety or that of others, you are strongly advised not to undertake/continue the activity.

Please take care with personal safety during the course of your survey. Field studies in the vicinity of water can be hazardous, especially if there are steep banks, so where possible it is best to work in pairs. The Mammal Society can take no responsibility for personal injury incurred by volunteers during the course of their surveys.

Access permission - Before commencing fieldwork you must obtain permission from the relevant landowner(s). A letter explaining your participation in a Mammal Society survey/monitoring scheme is provided in this handbook. Use this opportunity to ask landowners about the location of any potentially hazardous animals or natural features on their land. Heed any warning signs present on the land you are surveying. If access is granted but later revoked you must not continue with your fieldwork.

Surveyors working in Scotland should be aware that Access Laws are different from those stated above. Surveyors should comply with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) when undertaking fieldwork. SOAC may require surveyors to consult the relevant land manager(s) to let them know of your intention to carry out survey work. This applies if you intend to survey an area intensively, make frequent repeat visits or use survey equipment. Land managers in return have a duty to co-operate with surveyors, where possible, by allowing the taking of samples where this would not cause any damage. Respect the request of landowners if access is reasonably denied e.g. when shooting is taking place.

Park sensibly, preferably off-road. Do not park in passing places. Take care to ensure entrances are not blocked and traffic is not obstructed.

Personal equipment - Wear appropriate clothing and footwear for the terrain and weather conditions you are working in. Remember that older boots and shoes may lack the grip necessary for working in and around water. The weather can be unpredictable so ensure that you have suitable clothing for all weather conditions. Carry a torch, spare batteries, a compass, whistle, first aid kit, a survival bag and high-energy food.

Contact - If possible avoid lone working. However, it is recognized that in some situations it will not always be possible to avoid lone working and in these situations particular care should be taken. Never go into the field without informing a responsible person of where you are going (for more remote areas a grid reference is particularly advised) and when you expect to return, how you intend to travel to (and access) your site and who to contact if you do not return when expected. Consider also leaving your vehicle registration details with a responsible person. Ensure that you have a well formed contingency plan if you do not return when expected. Always carry a fully charged mobile telephone with you. Mobile phones may not work in some remoter areas and it is advisable to locate the nearest public telephone box or nearest inhabited house to your survey site.

Weather - Be aware that hazards may increase in rain, strong winds and thunderstorms. If bad weather is encountered do not commence your survey or cease it if already started. Surveying in heavy rain, strong winds, thunderstorms and temperatures of below 7°C is not advised.

Assessing your site - All fieldworkers should consider the particular hazards that are associated with their site/s. Identify potential hazards before you commence your survey. Assess your individual circumstances and medical conditions in relation to the potential hazards on your site before choosing to undertake the survey.

Health and safety reporting - If volunteers are to be accompanied by other people in whatever capacity, the information provided by The Mammal Society in this document should be passed onto these other people. Any particular health and safety concerns that you have about your site/s or the safety methods should be reported to The Mammal Society.

Livestock - Care should be taken when entering areas with livestock, particularly cattle, rams and horses. Do not enter fields containing bulls and be especially careful around cows with young calves as they can be particularly protective of their young. If you have any concerns remove yourself from the situation. Rutting deer can also be aggressive in autumn. If you intend to take your dog while surveying ensure that you keep it on a lead and under control at all times. If possible leave it well cared for with family or friends.

Farm machinery - Farm machinery should not be touched at any point. Avoid fieldwork in close proximity to working agricultural machinery.

Terrain - Please take extra care when surveying along watercourses, cliff edges, areas of boggy ground, reed beds and loose rock. Wear appropriate footwear and never cross rivers unless via a bridge. Avoid hazardous areas such as quarries, railway lines and ravines and do not attempt to climb steep slopes, walls or fences. If fieldwork is being carried out along roadsides wear bright-coloured clothing and if walking along roads ensure that you walk facing on-coming traffic. Take particular care on blind bends in the road. Have somebody keeping watch for traffic.

Where possible avoid muddy or boggy areas. If moving through these areas is unavoidable test every footstep on the ground before putting your weight on your feet. Proceed slowly and push a stick into the mud to test its consistency and depth before proceeding.

Human confrontation - If you have any concerns about your personal safety at any point then cease surveying and remove yourself from the situation. Carry a personal alarm. Carry some identification to confirm the survey you are involved with. Avoid working alone, particularly at night. Consider the privacy of residents, particularly when working in and around residential areas.

Diseases - Volunteers may be exposed to disease during survey work.

Handling of faecal material from wild small mammals presents no danger of disease provided that reasonable precautions are taken to minimise any possible risks. Remember to wash your hands after collecting the bait tubes and traps from the sites and after extracting faeces, and especially before eating, drinking and smoking.

Cuts or abrasions on the hands should be covered by sticking plaster or rubber gloves. Take particular care with these simple precautions at sites where brown rats are common since here there may be a risk of Weil's disease.

To reduce the risk of spreading disease, ensure footwear and outdoor clothing is cleaned before and after fieldwork. Follow any bio-security measures present on the land you are surveying, e.g. use disinfecting mats at gates etc.

If disease is expected or you feel unwell at any time after carrying out your survey then consult your doctor immediately explaining the type of fieldwork you have been involved in, including details of the mammal species that you have come into contact with. While not common, the following diseases can have severe effects and in rare cases can cause death:

1. **Tetanus** – This is caused by the bacterium *Clostridium tetani*, a common micro-organism found in soil. The infection of minor wounds and scratches can result in tetanus. All skin wounds should be covered before fieldwork is commenced and anti-tetanus treatments should be kept up to date. Always wash your hands after completing field work and before eating, drinking and smoking.
2. **Leptospirosis (Weil's disease)** – This bacterium is carried by rodents, particularly rats, and is excreted by their urine. This disease is commonly found in water and as for tetanus ensure that all wounds are covered and avoid contact with water that may have been contaminated by rat or cow urine. Longworth trapping, hair tubes and bait tubes are also possible reservoirs for Weil's disease. Wash hands thoroughly before eating, drinking and smoking. If you suffer from flu-like symptoms following field work, contact your doctor immediately and mention Weil's disease.
3. **Lyme disease** – The bacterium that causes Lyme disease is transmitted via the ticks of various species including deer, sheep and pheasants. When surveying in long grass or forested areas with thick undergrowth wear long trousers and long socks. On completing field work check exposed skin for ticks and if found remove. If a tick is found and you contract flu like symptoms contact your doctor and explain that you may have been exposed to Lyme disease.
4. **Tick-borne encephalitis** – This is a viral disease carried by animal ticks. There is a vaccine for this disease if prolonged exposure to tick-infested areas is a possibility. In Britain and Ireland a similar disease known as 'Louping ill' is also present. This is particularly associated with grouse and hares in moorland regions and has similar symptoms to tick-borne encephalitis ranging from flu-like symptoms to severe symptoms requiring hospitalisation.
5. **Salmonellosis** – This bacterial infection is common in rats and mice. If the bacterium is ingested as a result of poor hygiene then mild to severe food poisoning will occur.

The Mammal Society insurance - The Mammal Society has public liability and personal accident insurance for all volunteers taking part in one of their survey or monitoring schemes. Landowners may request a copy of our insurance information. If so please contact The Mammal Society and we can provide this.

Under 18 volunteers - All volunteers under 18 must inform The Mammal Society and must be accompanied during their fieldwork by an adult or write a letter which states that parents and guardians agree to their children undertaking the activity and are aware of the associated risks.

For further information on Health and Safety issues, visit the Health and Safety Executive website www.hse.gov.uk (tel.: 0845 345 0055).

The following downloadable HSE guides are particularly relevant:

INDG163(rev2): Five steps to risk assessment and INDG73: Working alone in safety

For further information on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, visit www.outdooraccess-scotland.com (tel.: 01463 725 000)

If you have any other questions about Health and Safety, please do email us at small.mammals@mammal.org.uk