



Health and Safety for Harvest Mouse Surveying

In Summary

Always wash your hands after fieldwork or use antiseptic gels or wipes. It is a good idea to ensure that your tetanus inoculation is up to date. Take the usual precautions when working in the field, especially if your site is remote. Ensure you have warm and waterproof clothing and footwear. If possible carry a mobile phone and always let someone else know where you will be working and when you expect to return. Please ensure that you adhere to the current government guidance regarding social distancing, face coverings and numbers if surveying in a group.

As a volunteer you are under no obligation to participate in the survey 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.

The Mammal Society has public liability insurance for all volunteers taking part in one of their surveys or monitoring schemes. Landowners may request a copy of our insurance information. This can be requested by contacting the Mammal Society (finance@themammalsociety.org). Under 18s taking part in the survey, must inform the Mammal Society that they are doing so and we will need to be accompanied by a responsible adult for them to be covered under the insurance policy. A letter for landowners which explains your involvement in the survey, is available from the National Harvest Mouse Survey website (<https://www.mammal.org.uk/science-research/harvest-mouse-project/>) and it is advisable to carry this letter at all times when conducting fieldwork as a form of identification and involvement in the survey.

In Full

The following information provides notes on good practice when undertaking surveys. 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

Volunteers have been asked not to survey on private land and we suggest survey sites are confined to areas with public access or right of way. Any fieldwork on public land must obtain permission from the relevant landowner(s) before surveying. A letter explaining your participation in a Mammal Society survey/monitoring scheme is provided on the [survey webpage](#). 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: <https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/>) 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 cooperate 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. For more guidance, make sure to read the suggested equipment list included in the training material, available on the survey website.

Contact

If possible, avoid working alone. 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.

Accessing 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. If surveying on roadsides a distance of 1.2 m from the road edge is recommended.

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 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. Make sure you have received your last tetanus vaccine. 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. 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 as soon as possible – the sooner the tick is found and removed the lower the chance of developing the disease. 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.
6. COVID-19 – This is a respiratory virus that can have serious health effects in the elderly and other at-risk demographics. To ensure you do not become infected, ensure anyone you are with has not been contacted via Test and Trace and you keep to the government guidance that has been issued for the time of your survey.

The Mammal Society Insurance

The Mammal Society has Public and Employer's Liability Insurance which covers 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 (finance@themammalsociety.org) 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 a responsible adult.

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.outdooraccessscotland.com (tel.: 01463 725 000)

If you have any other questions about Health and Safety, please do email us at finance@themammalsociety.org