

Bedfordshire Natural History Society

General health and safety information to volunteer fieldworkers involved in the Bedfordshire Bird Club Breeding Bird Atlas

Notes on good practice, which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful before undertaking Atlas fieldwork.

Volunteer responsibility. As a volunteer, you are under no obligation to participate or continue with a survey or scheme. Volunteers are responsible for their own health and safety and should not put themselves in a position that could place them, or others, in danger. You should never undertake any work if you have concerns about your own or others' health and safety. If you have any such concerns, you should stop the work and raise these with your survey organiser.

Access permission. Always obtain permission from the relevant landowners or tenants to enter any private land before commencing fieldwork. Do not continue fieldwork if access permission is later revoked. A letter confirming your participation in fieldwork can be provided on request. Please abide by The Countryside Code.

Risk assessment. Before undertaking any activities, every fieldworker should consider the particular health and safety hazards associated with their individual study sites and whether their individual circumstances and medical conditions expose them to particular hazards. Individuals should assess any potential risks arising from their fieldwork activities, which should include considering the risks specific to individual sites. You should think about what precautions should be taken against any risks. If you have any concerns, please raise these with your survey organiser.

Health and safety reporting. Fieldworkers should pass on health and safety information provided to them by the organiser to other people helping them with Atlas fieldwork.

Mobile telephones. It is advisable to carry a mobile telephone, which may be useful in case of an emergency. Mobile telephones may not work in some areas, and are only of any use if you are conscious and capable of operating them.

Fieldwork at night or in the evening. When working into the hours of darkness, carry a torch and spare batteries. Where appropriate, inform colleagues of your intended area of operations. Be extra vigilant at night and wear something bright or reflective when walking on roads. If possible, do not work alone.

Livestock and agricultural machinery. Take special care when entering areas with livestock, especially cattle, rams and horses. Do not enter fields containing bulls and be especially cautious with farm dogs. Rutting deer can also be aggressive in the autumn. Avoid undertaking fieldwork in close proximity to working agricultural machinery or forestry operations.

Parking. Take care to park sensibly, preferably off-road. Ensure that entrances are not blocked.

Terrain. Take special care when carrying out fieldwork along watercourses and in areas that contain boggy ground, reedbeds or loose rocks. Wear bright-coloured clothing when carrying out fieldwork along busy roads. Do not cross potentially hazardous sites, such as quarries and railway lines and do not attempt to climb steep slopes, walls or fences. Please heed warning signs and do not enter land that has been deliberately obstructed by fencing or barbed wire.

Human confrontation. Consider your personal safety when conducting fieldwork within the vicinity of known or likely trouble spots. Avoid confrontation with landowners, land workers or members of the public. Consider the privacy of residents when performing early-morning survey work in residential areas. Carry some form of identification to confirm the activities you are undertaking. If you have any concerns about your personal safety, cease fieldwork immediately.

Diseases. Fieldworkers may be exposed to disease during survey work. If a disease is suspected, then it is important to inform your doctor that you may have been exposed to diseases associated with outdoor activities. Typical diseases that may be encountered are:

- **Weil's disease**, a severe form of leptospirosis that can be fatal if left untreated. The organism is carried by rats and excreted in their urine, and persists in water such as in puddles in rat-infested places. Thus visits to places where rats might occur may pose a risk.
- **Lyme disease**, a bacterial disease transmitted by animal ticks associated with rank vegetation, which leads to severe symptoms if left untreated. A variety of animals act as hosts for the bacteria, including sheep, deer and pheasants. For more information, see: www.bada-uk.org or contact BADA-UK (PO Box 70, North Walsham, NR28 0WX).
- **Tick-borne Encephalitis**, a viral disease carried by animal ticks. Warm forested areas with heavy undergrowth give the greatest risk from ticks in late spring and summer. A vaccine is available where prolonged exposure in the risk areas is likely. In Britain & Ireland, a related virus responsible for 'Louping ill', a disease with symptoms varying from a mild flu-like illness to more severe disease requiring hospitalisation, can infect a wide variety of mammal and bird hosts.

Minimising the risk of such diseases requires straightforward actions. For example:

- Remove ticks from the skin as soon as possible: wear light-coloured clothing so that ticks are visible, tuck trouser bottoms into socks so that ticks cannot attach or climb up the leg, and make regular checks of skin and hair.
- During fieldwork, cuts and abrasions should be kept covered by a dressing. A basic first aid kit should always be carried.

Further information about the Countryside Code and countryside access issues can be obtained from...

Countryside Agency: www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk (tel. 0845-100-3298)

Birdwatchers' Code: www.bto.org/notices/birdwatchers_code/intro.htm (tel. 01842-750050)