

Important guidance for VMFW survey volunteers

Thank you for offering your time to undertake a farmland survey. We do hope you enjoy your survey work - if you have any questions at any time please don't hesitate to get in touch.

This document gives you some important information to be aware of when volunteering with us. Please read through the document carefully to make sure that you are fully aware of this information. Thank you.

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Contacting the farmer

You will be given contact details for the farmer via email. The farmer will have been informed that you will be contacting them, so they should be looking out for an email or a text/phone call from you. However, please be aware that farmers may spend a lot of time away from devices and there can be delays in them getting back to you. Don't be disheartened! If you have tried email and have not got a response, try contacting them by text or phone. If you are concerned that they are just not responding to you at all, please let us know and we will try to find out what the issue is.

RSPB ambassadors

A priority of our work is to foster closer links with the farming community. It is important to remember that farmers will view you as a representative of the RSPB, and therefore diplomacy and courtesy are essential.

For the most part, you will find farmers pleasant, enthusiastic, and helpful, although please be mindful of how busy they may be! However, there may be awkward moments when a farmer may engage you in discussion on a sensitive subject. We ask you to set aside any personal feelings or opinions and refer the farmer to us if they have any questions, so that we can advise on the agreed policy and view of the RSPB as an organisation.

Farmers may also undertake activities on their farm with which you disagree. If you are unsure about any activities you encounter on the farm, such as predator control measures, please contact us for clarification. Do not confront the farmer or anyone involved in any such activity.



Please avoid blaming farmers for the decline of farmland birds. The RSPB believes that changes in land use and farming operations are a significant contributing factor in these declines, but the picture is complex, and the changes have been driven by national and international policies more intent on cheap food production than wildlife conservation. Many farmers are doing their best to balance food production with looking after the countryside.

If you are asked for land management advice, please explain that **your role does not permit you to give advice**. Please refer the farmer to us so that we can decide the best way to address their needs.

Using your own vehicle for volunteering

As you will be using your own vehicle to drive to the farm, and maybe for other reasons connected to the project, there are some things we need you to know.

The [RSPB Volunteer Handbook](#) provides some general information about using your own vehicle while volunteering, particularly with regard to checking with your insurers that your policy will cover this.

In addition, for VMFW specifically, please note:

- In order to consider your travel as a 'leisure activity', we ask that you **do not travel to more than one place for your volunteering with us in any one day**. This means that if you have undertaken to carry out surveys on more than one farm, for example, you should make your visits to these farms on different days. This helps us to cut down on the administration overhead for you and us.
- If you do need to travel to **more than one location in the same day**, please let us know, as you will need to complete a Driver Entitlement Consent Form in this instance, as that would be considered business travel.

Health and Safety

This is so important when visiting farms that we have a separate document dedicated to it! Please read [Health and Safety Information for Farm Surveyors](#) and explore any associated links and documents, so that you are fully aware of the personal safety aspects of volunteering with us.

There is a [Health and Safety Checklist](#) which you should complete with your farmer at your first meeting and use to check for any changes every time you visit the farm.

Company on the surveys

If you have been paired with another volunteer to carry out the survey, you will need to work together to arrange survey visit timings. Further information will be given to you at the time of matching. Please do all you can to be respectful and friendly to the other volunteer, and if at any time you feel uncomfortable about the situation, please contact us as soon as possible.

If you wish to take anyone with you on your surveying, you must **agree this in advance with the farmer** and understand that you are responsible for their welfare.

If the farmer would like to accompany you themselves or would like any members of their family or staff to accompany you, this should be regarded as a **private arrangement** and is not the responsibility of the RSPB.

Rarities and confidentiality

It is important that you let us know as soon as possible if you spot any rare birds or other species while carrying out your survey. We can then ensure that any necessary measures are put in place to protect them.

It is also extremely important that you **do not tell other birdwatchers or share this information**. We have a commitment of confidentiality to the farmer, and presence of a rarity could attract unwanted attention to the farm.

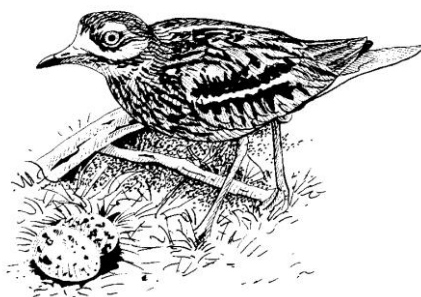
Photography

We encourage you to take photos, either to upload to BirdTrack to support your records, or to show relevant things on the farm, such as habitat areas or other wildlife.

If you take any photos that you think would be useful for us to use in reports or future publicity for the project, please do send them to us. If you take pictures of identifiable people, please make sure you get the person's consent.

Disturbance

Please take care not to disturb any nesting birds. However, any evidence of breeding would be interesting to the farmer, so although we don't require it for the surveys, we would welcome any records of nesting behaviour. This information can be entered in BirdTrack - please see [VMFW BirdTrack Instructions](#) for details.



Claiming expenses

The [RSPB Volunteer Handbook](#) provides some general information about claiming travel expenses for use of your own vehicle while volunteering.

If you would like to be reimbursed for your travel, information can be found here: [How to claim VMFW travel expenses](#).