

Health and Safety information for VMFW Farm Surveyors

The RSPB wants your volunteering to be safe. Please read this document carefully to ensure that you have a good understanding of the health and safety aspects of working on farmland. The main hazards, which are largely common sense, are outlined, but please be mindful of the unexpected.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE HEALTH AND SAFETY CHECKLIST AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT WITH YOUR FARMER BEFORE ANY SURVEY WORK IS UNDERTAKEN.

Keeping yourself and others safe

As an RSPB volunteer, we ask you to work in a way that does not jeopardise your own safety, or the safety of others.

Please make sure you have informed us of any special requirements you may have to undertake a farm survey safely, such as allergies or medical conditions, and make sure you are fully rested before setting out.

Your wellbeing

- ! For your own protection, check the weather forecast, make sure you wear suitable clothing for the conditions and use sun cream if necessary. You will be unlikely to see many birds in poor weather, so be prepared to abandon a survey visit if necessary. Take enough water and sustenance with you.
- ! Carry any medication you may need and check yourself for ticks after surveying. It is a good idea to carry some basic first aid equipment with you, to deal with small cuts or insect stings/bites.
- ! Please visit your doctor if you sustain any injury, and please let us know as soon as possible if you have had an accident whilst carrying out a survey or have encountered something dangerous. This will help us to ensure your and others' safety better in the future.
- ! Strong walking boots or wellies are advised. Where terrain is uneven and requires attention to walk, stop at regular points to carry out your observations.

Lone working

You may be working in a remote location and in the event of an accident there may be difficulties in obtaining emergency help.

All survey volunteers, especially those undertaking work alone, should do the following:

- ✓ **Always let the farmer know when you arrive at the farm and when you leave.**
- ✓ If possible, take your mobile phone with you, although be aware that you may not always be able to get a signal.
- ✓ Take a whistle with you in case you need to attract attention in an emergency.
- ✓ Make yourself aware of any nearby properties where you could go to seek help.

- ✓ Before setting out, provide a responsible person, such as your partner or a friend, with the following information:
 - Your mobile number.
 - Your whereabouts (including an OS grid reference). Also consider installing tracking information on your phone as an additional indicator of your location.
 - Your mode of travel to and from the farm (including car registration number and model).
 - A contact for your location, e.g. the phone number and name of the farmer.
 - Your departure time, and estimated time of return.
- ✓ If you fail to return, the nominated person should use all the information you have given them to try to locate you. If they have exhausted all attempts to contact or find you, they should contact the police at their own discretion.

Parking

- ✓ After discussion with the farmer, identify a safe place to park your vehicle.
- ✓ Do not block any access routes and always turn your vehicle round before parking, so that it is ready to drive off immediately in an emergency.
- ✓ Do not take a vehicle beyond its capabilities, particularly off road.
- ✓ Give the farmer your car's registration number, make, and colour, and display an RSPB volunteer [windscreen notice](#) to avoid confusion or suspicion.

Hazards on farmland

Under most conditions, farmland is a low-risk environment. However, there are a number of potential hazards on farmland which you should be aware of. When arranging to survey a farm, discuss with the farmer exactly which areas you will be surveying, so that you can understand what hazards may be present and how to avoid them.

Guard animals

- ! Farm dogs, however friendly they look, should always be treated with caution, and guard geese can be surprisingly aggressive! Do not approach animals of any kind unless the farmer is there to facilitate the interaction.

Machinery

- ! Keep well clear of all working agricultural machinery.
- ! If you need to speak to a driver/operator of a working machine, attract their attention from a safe distance and indicate that you wish to approach. Please only approach when the driver/operator indicates that it is safe to do so.

Livestock

- ! Check with the farmer whether there are fields containing livestock that may cause problems and avoid these where possible.
- ! Livestock can be very hazardous! **Treat all livestock with caution.** Cows with calves can be very protective of young and can, and do, charge. Untethered bulls can be similarly dangerous, and young stock is likely to be frisky and curious if recently let out to pasture.
- ! Do not, under any circumstances, take a dog with you while you are surveying.

Hazardous features/structures

- ! Identify potentially hazardous features and structures with the farmer. These can include barbed wire or electric fencing, cables, ponds and ditches, and unfenced structures such as slurry pits.
- ! Take care if you have to enter the farmyard and do not enter farm buildings.
- ! Identify proper crossing points between fields to avoid jumping across or climbing into ditches and streams. If you need to cross a fence line, do so using a gate or stile.
- ! Avoid all electrical structures.

Predator/pest control

- ! Check with the farmer if any predator or pest control work is taking place and avoid any areas where shooting is taking place.
- ! Do not touch any rodent poison bait stations (boxes or tubes with a small entrance hole), cage traps or snares.
- ! Do not touch any dead animals – report them to the farmer, if you feel they should know.

Chemical hazards

- ! Check with the farmer the day before any survey visit and enquire about any recent spraying operations. Spraying requires good weather, as does surveying, and a decision to spray may be made with less than 12 hours' notice. Follow any instructions given by the farmer and postpone your visit if there is a potential hazard from spraying along your survey route.

Biological hazards

- ! There is a small risk of contracting Lyme disease whilst working on agricultural land. Please familiarise yourself with the information given here: [Tick bite risk reduction | Lyme Disease Action](#), to minimise this risk.
- ! There is also a small risk of contracting Leptospirosis (Weil's disease) whilst working on agricultural land. Please follow the precautions provided here: [Leptospirosis leaflet](#), to minimise this risk.
- ! Ensure your tetanus inoculation is up to date.

Terrain

- ! In coastal areas, check for and avoid slippery vegetation on cliff edges, and do not lean over or stand too close to the edge.
- ! Avoid any areas with undercutting or loose material.
- ! Farm tracks and land can often be muddy and low-lying farmland can easily flood after rainfall. Rabbit holes and uneven terrain may be hidden under long vegetation.
- ! Where terrain is uneven and requires attention to walk, stop at regular points to carry out your observations.

Biosecurity

- ! There is a risk of transmitting disease between livestock, particularly if you live on or are a regular visitor to a farm with livestock and are surveying a farm with livestock. This is also true if you are surveying more than one site with livestock. In such cases, it is important to discuss this

with the farmer, who will be able to advise you on the appropriate course of action, which may involve taking a change of footwear or disinfecting between each site.

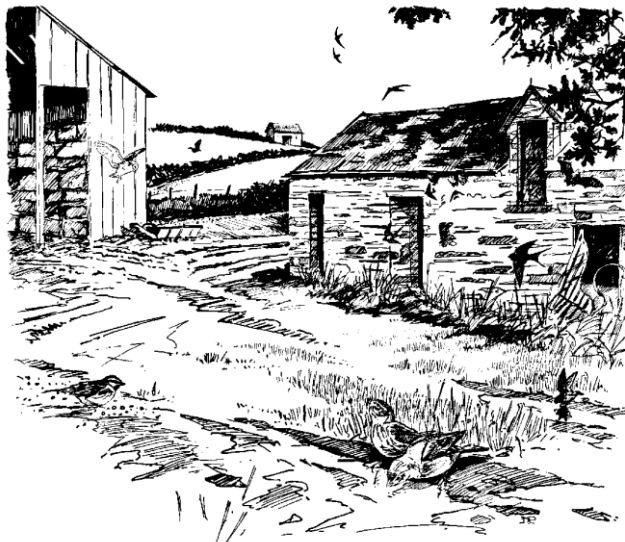
Fire prevention

- ! Ensure that all smoking materials are extinguished or, better still, avoid using them in vulnerable areas and at times of high fire risk. Fire can be a big risk on agricultural land. Particularly vulnerable are hay and straw stacks, stubble fields, and crops in periods of dry weather.

Each time you visit, you should check with the farmer to establish if there have been any changes to the Health and Safety checklist since your last visit.

While all the above risks are very real, they are also easy to avoid. We expect you to postpone a survey to a later date on safety grounds if the circumstances demand it. However, common sense and vigilance should ensure you have a very safe and enjoyable experience.

If you have any further queries, please email us at farmsurveys@rspb.org.uk.



If you are in any doubt about the safety of what you are about to do, please do not do it.

Volunteer name: _____ Survey code: _____ Date: _____

Please discuss the following health and safety topics with your farmer, adding any notes or actions in the spaces provided.

	Discussed/ Checked	Notes/Actions
Parking Have I parked in an agreed location and provided the farmer with the details of my vehicle?		
Machinery Is any machinery being used in the areas I will be surveying?		
Livestock In the areas I will have access to, are there any livestock or guard animals I need to be wary of/avoid?		
Hazardous features and farmyard structures Are there any hazardous features or structures I need to be aware of? Have I identified and resolved any difficulties in crossing field boundaries with the farmer?		
Predator control, pest control and shoots Is this carried out in the areas I have access to?		
Chemical hazards Are any chemicals being used in the area I will be surveying?		
Biological hazards Are there any areas where biting/stinging insects such as horseflies, bees, or wasps are known to be prevalent?		
Terrain Are there any particular areas of difficult terrain on my survey route?		
Biosecurity Does the farmer have any concerns about the risk of me transmitting disease between livestock?		
Fire prevention Are there any specific fire precautions I need to be aware of on the farm?		