



Advice on COVID-19 and Undertaking Site-Based Ecological Work

24 March 2020

In line with the current advice of UK governments to restrict unnecessary travel and contact with others, it is likely that most ecological survey work and ECoW work will need to be postponed. If you are undertaking site-based work of any description, here is our current advice on keeping yourself and others safe.

Risk Assessment

Firstly, is your journey and site-based work strictly necessary? Can it be postponed or are there alternative approaches? At present, it is for individuals and employers to make that judgement call as to whether a site visit should be undertaken but government requirements should be complied with at all times.

All journeys and survey/ECoW situations should be assessed on a journey by journey and site by site basis using a Dynamic Risk Assessment approach. If the journey and site visit cannot be conducted with minimal and manageable risk, it should not be undertaken.

Where journeys are undertaken, they should be undertaken by car, travelling alone. Using public transport is not safe for you or for others. If a survey or other site-based activity requires more than one person you should travel separately and stay at least 2m apart on site at all times.

If hire cars are used, you should check that the hire company undertakes a deep clean of the vehicle before use.

If you have a survey team, consider keeping the same surveyors working as part of the same team on the same surveys. Minimising mixing of survey staff will help to control the spread of the virus should a team member be affected.

Overnight stays and long journeys should be avoided. Use local sub-contractors to undertake site-based work so that it can be safely done without the need for an overnight stay or requiring people (or yourself) to drive long distances.

Avoid all face-to-face meetings where possible. If you do come into contact with other people, maintain a safe distance. Follow government advice on hand washing and hygiene at all times. Take special care when eating/drinking.

Use (or provide) appropriate PPE including hand sanitizers and gloves (e.g. for use at petrol stations) – but please note that gloves can give a false sense of security.

All equipment used should, of course, be thoroughly washed between surveys. Ideally use only your own set of field survey equipment and do not share with others.

Take as much food and drink from home as possible to avoid having to buy food and drink from shops and risking poor hygiene handling.

Payments for goods should be by card (preferably contactless) avoiding handling cash.



Survey Techniques

Consider whether you can adapt your survey approach to avoid overnight stays, whilst minimising the impact on the efficacy of the survey results and ensuring the well-being of those undertaking the surveys. For example:

- Avoid combined dusk and dawn bat surveys, surveying at dusk and dawn on separate visits or using different surveyors.
- Avoid the need for bottle trapping for newts where this requires an overnight stay or repeated long journeys, relying on other survey techniques instead.
- Consider the site-specific circumstances that may justify a slightly later start for a breeding bird survey with appropriate caveats.

A key message is that if you have to adapt your survey technique because of COVID-19 precautions/restrictions, make sure you are up-to-date with the latest SNCB/LPA advice first. Justify the approach that you have taken in your report, highlight it as a limitation and explain the implications of the limitations on the conclusions and recommendations.

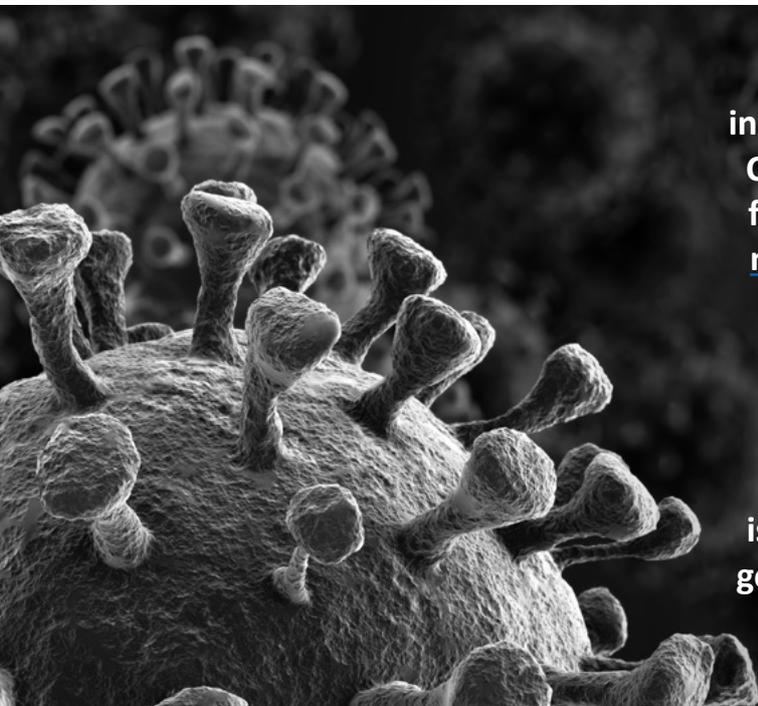
You may need to reflect this in your assessment and recommendations, for example:

- Make assessments on a precautionary basis, for example, assuming presence or assuming the largest likely population size.
- Recommend and undertake update surveys as soon as reasonably practical.
- Recommend mitigation on a precautionary basis designed to deal with any uncertainties.

Developing Situation

The current situation is one that we can all get through more easily if we can support each other by sharing advice and ideas on how to continue to undertake surveys safely. To share your ideas please go to our LinkedIn thread (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4306428/>) on this topic.

We will update this advice as more information becomes available.



If you develop symptoms that indicate a possible infection with COVID-19 (e.g. coughing or high fever – see [NHS advice at www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/)) or have been in close contact with anyone that develops these symptoms, you should stop work, inform your colleagues, and consider self-isolating in accordance with the government guidance in force at the time of onset.