



Advice on COVID-19 and Undertaking Field Surveys

20 March 2020

We recognise that some of our members are concerned about the approach they should be taking in order to follow UK governments advice and protect themselves and others from the COVID-19 virus. CIEEM is liaising with the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs) and Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE) to establish whether there are any temporary guidelines on amending practice in relation to protected species surveys in the light of restrictions on access, travel and the need for social distancing. In the meantime, the following advice may be helpful.

Given the Government advice to avoid non-essential travel, it is recommended that the need for all proposed surveys and journeys is reviewed and the options carefully considered. Is a given survey or journey necessary? Can it be avoided, combined with another journey, or delayed until later in the year (dependent on seasonal restrictions)?

Risk Assessment

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

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.

For survey sites that are some distance away, consider sub-contracting the survey so that

it can be safely done without the need for an overnight stay.

Surveyors should be provided with appropriate PPE including hand sanitizers and gloves (e.g. for use at petrol stations) – but please note gloves can give a false sense of security. Good hand washing hygiene is of paramount importance, especially when eating.

All equipment used should, of course be thoroughly washed between surveys.

Travel and Subsistence

Public transport should be avoided where practically possible. Keep journeys as short as possible, put hand hygiene measures in place and avoid touching surfaces unnecessarily.

Survey staff should travel separately, not sharing vehicles. Where this means driving long distances in multiple vehicles to the same site you should consider the need to undertake the survey and whether there are other options, like using locally-based sub-contractors, to minimise the environmental impact.

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

Surveyors should be encouraged to take as much food and drink from home as possible (being reimbursed appropriately) to avoid having to buy food and drink from shops and restaurants (which may well not be available/open) and risking poor hygiene handling.

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



Survey Techniques

Employ social distancing techniques when undertaking field surveys.

Minimise overnight hotel stays (see using sub-contractors above) **but** avoid driving long distances and for excessive hours in order to avoid an overnight stay. Assess **all** the risks.

Where surveys are some distance from the surveyor's home and unsocial hours are required, and local sub-contractors are not available, consider whether you can adapt the 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, 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, assuming presence or assuming the largest likely population size, for example.
- 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/](http://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.



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