

Monitoring butterflies - Health and Safety

This guidance note provides an outline to best practice health and safety when monitoring butterflies in the field.



Volunteer responsibility

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. As a volunteer, you are under no obligation to participate or continue with a survey or scheme. 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 Butterfly Conservation (BC) or the local contact. You are under no obligation to visit a particular site, even if the organisers have requested it (although data collected from another site may not be usable).

General precautions

When visiting a site take care to park sensibly, preferably off-road, and do not block entrances. Take a map to new sites to avoid getting lost. Check weather reports before you go out and wear appropriate clothing. It is especially important to wear long-sleeved clothes and trousers when recording in long vegetation. Use sun protection including a wide-brimmed hat and sun screen. Make sure you drink plenty of water and take food if out for long periods of time. Take regular breaks, it is particularly important to take shade in hot weather.

Insurance

Any volunteer who is undertaking butterfly monitoring on behalf of Butterfly Conservation and whose name and address is held either by Head Office or a co-ordinator/survey champion will be covered by Butterfly Conservation's Employer's Liability and Public Liability Insurances. In addition the volunteer will have Personal Accident cover.

Access permission

Always obtain permission from the relevant landowners or tenant to enter any private land not subject to open access legislation, 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. It is courteous to contact the landowner and explain what you are doing and why, when it is practical to do so. Please abide by The Countryside Code (www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk) and the Scottish OAC (www.outdooraccess-scotland.com).

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 the level of any potential risks arising from their fieldwork activities, which should include considering the risks specific to individual sites. You should think about what practical precautions should be taken to reduce the level of any risks. If you have any concerns, please raise these with BC.

Health and safety reporting

Fieldworkers should pass on health and safety information provided to them by BC to other people helping them with BC-related activities. You are encouraged to report any particular health and safety issues about the survey methods or the survey sites to BC or your local contact. All accidents and incidents which could have led to harm must be reported to BC.

Mobile telephones

It is advisable to carry a mobile phone, which may be useful in case of an emergency. Please note that mobile phones may not work in some remote areas. In case of an emergency remember that the European Emergency Number (112) should be considered as well as 999 (see www.eena.org for more information).

Lone working/working in remote areas

If you find it necessary to work alone or you are working in a remote place, always leave a note of your whereabouts with a responsible person. This should include: date and time of departure, method of travel to and around the site, proposed itinerary, expected time of leaving the site and return to base, and vehicle identification details. The person to whom these details are given should be told whom to contact if you do not return and at what time to raise the alarm. If working in mountains, moorlands or unpredictable and extreme environments, hypothermia is a significant risk. In such situations, it is appropriate to wear footwear with good ankle support and to carry warm and waterproof clothing. Carry a map and compass and know how to use them. Carry a whistle, waterproof watch and where appropriate, a survival bag with extra high-energy food supplies. Avoid or abandon outdoor activities in bad weather.

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.

What to do if a strange dog approaches you

- Stay still – do not run away. Drop anything you are holding in case this is what has attracted the dog to you. Do not shout or wave your arms. Calmly and softly give a command such as 'sit' or 'stay', as many dogs respond to these.
- Avoid eye contact – Do not look the dog directly in the eye as this can be seen as a form of aggression and a challenge. Watch their chest, shoulder or look at the tip of their nose.
- Ignore the dog if it jumps up – do not shout or push the dog down, as it may think it is a game. Stay still and do not respond and it may eventually get bored and walk away. If you are knocked to the ground, remain motionless in the foetal position and protect your face by crossing your arms above your head.
- Move very slowly – when you do move, move slowly and stay facing the dog.

Terrain

Take special care when carrying out fieldwork along watercourses, cliff edges, or in areas that contain boggy ground, reed beds, loose rocks or areas with underground burrows (e.g. badger and rabbit holes) often found along field edges. Wear brightly coloured clothing when carrying out fieldwork along busy roads. Do not cross potentially hazardous sites, such as quarries, ravines and railway lines, and do not attempt to climb steep slopes, walls or fences. Please heed warning signs and do not enter private (non access) 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. You may wish to carry some form of identification to confirm the activities you are undertaking (e.g. landowner letter available on request). If you have any concerns about your personal safety, cease fieldwork immediately.

Lyme disease

Lyme disease is 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 544, Wath upon Dearne, Rotherham, S63 3DW). Remove ticks from the skin as soon as possible, wear light-coloured clothing so that ticks are visible, tuck trousers into socks so that ticks cannot attach or climb up the leg, and make regular checks of skin and hair.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease caused by a coronavirus. It spreads primarily through respiratory droplets produced when coughing, sneezing or talking. Whilst most infected people will only suffer mild to moderate symptoms, the elderly and those with underlying health conditions are more likely to develop serious illness. In order to minimize the risk of contracting or spreading this disease you should practice social-distancing, avoid face-to-face contact with those outside your household, use sanitiser to keep your hands clean (eg. after contact with shared surfaces like gates/stiles) and avoid touching your face. Further guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home/staying-safe-outside-your-home>