

This guidance note provides an outline of best practice in terms of health and safety when monitoring ponds.

### Volunteer responsibility

**Whilst carrying out work for Freshwater Habitats Trust each volunteer has the responsibility of ensuring they undertake their work considering their own health and safety and that of others around them.**

As a volunteer you should not put yourself in a position that could place yourself, or others, in danger. You are under no obligation to participate or continue with a survey. You are under no obligation to visit a particular site, even if the survey organisers have suggested it. 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 Freshwater Habitats Trust, either centrally or via your regional coordinator.

### 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.**

A table outlining generic areas of risk likely in pond surveying is given below (Table 1). However, you should identify the potential risks specific to the fieldwork activities associated with your individual sites and should think about, and apply practical precautions to minimise the level of any risks. Fieldworkers should also pass on health and safety information provided to them by Freshwater Habitats Trust to any other people helping them with Freshwater Habitats Trust - related activities.

### Health and safety reporting

**Please report any health and safety issues or concerns about the survey methods or the survey sites to Freshwater Habitats Trust.**

All accidents and incidents which could have led to harm must be reported to Freshwater Habitats Trust. Please record the details of any incident as soon as possible after the event.

### Access permission

**Permission to visit your field site will have been sought from relevant landowners/managers in advance of your visit.**

In some cases landowners have asked to be contacted personally to know when you will be on site. If this is the case, that information will be shown on your site survey information pack. Please contact the landowners if this is required, or alert your regional coordinator who will make the arrangements for you. Do not continue fieldwork if access permission is revoked at any point and, if this is the case, please contact your regional coordinator who will update the map sheet. A letter confirming your participation in fieldwork can be provided on request. Ponds to which you do not have access to, and should not visit are marked by an X on your map.

Please abide by The Countryside Code ([www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk))

### Parking

**When visiting a site take care to park cars sensibly, preferably off-road, and do not block entrances.** A notice in the car window can be useful to alert locals to your purpose and contact details (a car windscreen sign is included in your pack).

## About the Freshwater Habitats Trust

The Freshwater Habitats Trust is a national charity committed to protecting and increasing the biodiversity of freshwaters across the UK, through research, policy, outreach, and education.

[www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk](http://www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

## General precautions

Take a map to new sites to avoid getting lost. Check weather reports before you go out and wear appropriate clothing e.g. wellington boots and long-sleeved clothes and trousers to prevent scratches and nettle stings. In hot weather 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 to prevent lapses in concentration. Avoid or abandon outdoor activities in bad weather.

## Working around ponds, including lone working

**Ponds can be dangerous places with deep water, steep and slippery banks and unsafe floating mats of vegetation.** They may also be surrounded by dense vegetation which can be a trip hazard, or cause abrasions to the body, face and eyes. For health and safety reasons volunteers must ensure they are accompanied by a companion in the following circumstances:

1. All visits undertaken at night (e.g. for newt torching).
2. All visits where they are likely to enter the water, for example aquatic invertebrate netting surveys and wetland plant surveys.

**In general please avoid working alone wherever possible.** We strongly recommend that you are accompanied on your first visit to your survey pond(s), and only work alone in future at sites where your risk assessment indicates there are minimal risks e.g. ponds that do not have steep or slippery banks etc.

If your risk assessment indicates that the survey pond is too dangerous to survey at all – especially if it has unstable banks or would require access across floating mats of vegetation, then retreat from the pond and choose another site. This should usually be the nearest pond for which you have permission. Please also inform your regional coordinator who will change the base map details and identify another 1 km square for you if the square is now unsuitable for survey.

If you find it necessary to work alone or you are accompanied, but working in a remote place, please ensure you have read and implemented the measures outlined in the Freshwater Habitats Trust lone-working document.

## Lone working Code of Practice

**Always leave a note of your whereabouts with a responsible person (buddy system).** This should include: date and time of departure, method of travel to and around the site, proposed itinerary, and 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. A lone working pro-form is included in your pack,

## Difficult 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. Do not cross potentially hazardous sites, such as quarries, ravines and railway lines. Please heed warning signs and do not enter private (non access) land that has been deliberately obstructed by fencing or barbed wire.



Take sensible precautions whilst undertaking pond surveys – read the guidance, have fun, stay safe

## Livestock and agricultural machinery

**Take special care when entering areas with livestock**, especially cattle, rams and horses. If livestock are likely to be present on the site do not take a dog with you on fieldwork. 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.

## 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 permission letter (available on request)) or volunteer survey card (included in your pack). If you have any concerns about your personal safety, cease fieldwork immediately and contact your regional coordinator.

## Waterborne diseases

**Working in water is a potential source of disease** including leptospirosis or Weil's disease, hepatitis A and tetanus. In all cases the best preventative measures are:

- Be aware of where and how these diseases can be caught and take precautions based on this knowledge.
- Ensure tetanus jabs are up to date.
- Ensure that any cuts on hands are covered with waterproof plasters and carefully clean and cover any cuts or grazes that occur whilst working in water.
- Wear protective clothing such as gloves.
- Avoid ingestion of water.
- Ensure that hands are washed after contact with water especially before eating or smoking.
- If you have entered the water, wash thoroughly and as soon as possible.
- If feeling unwell after a site visit, seek medical attention and notify them of your area of work.

## Lyme disease

**Lyme disease is a bacterial disease transmitted by animal ticks associated with rank vegetation, which can lead 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](http://www.bada-uk.org) or contact BADA-UK (PO Box 544, Wath upon Dearne, Rotherham, S63 3DW). Make regular checks of skin and hair. 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 inside of clothing without being seen.

## Mobile phones

**It is advisable to carry a mobile phone, as they 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 you can use either the European Emergency Number (112) or 999 (see [www.eena.org](http://www.eena.org) for more information). 112 can be dialled even if the keypad is locked.

## Contact

PondNet is one of three projects within Freshwater Habitats Trust's People, Ponds and Water Project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund

Project Administrator: Thea Powell

t: 01865 595502 e: [peoplepondswater@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk](mailto:peoplepondswater@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)

## Table 1. VOLUNTEER POND SURVEY RISK ASSESSMENT

This risk assessment identifies potential risks and precautions that a volunteer must be aware of and may encounter on a site visit to conduct habitat surveys. Volunteers must read this assessment before conducting any survey work on behalf of the PondNet project and Freshwater Habitats Trust

HAZARD	RISK	People at risk	Risk rating (low, medium, high)	Precautions / Controls	Risk after controls (low, medium, high)
<b>Livestock</b>	Physical injury, trampling	Site users including surveyors	Low	Be aware of livestock behaviour, if in doubt leave the site. Do not take dogs on site.	Low
<b>Dogs</b>	Bites, disease, lacerations	Site users including surveyors	Low	Be wary of dogs off leads. Disinfect any bites and seek medical attention.	Low
<b>Adders</b>	Poisoning, allergic reaction, paralysis, death	Site users including surveyors	Medium, High in Winter	Check the area you are visiting to see if this species is present. Take care to look at the ground when kneeling or placing your hands on the ground. Wear stout boots. Take extra care when lifting debris from the ground.	Medium
<b>Biological/ stings and bites</b>	Diseases, allergic reactions	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Wear long trousers and long sleeved tops to limit tick bites, but always check thoroughly after site visits and remove ticks correctly if found. If known to be allergic to stings, take medication on site. Make sure any open cuts/wounds are covered. If feeling unwell after a site visit, seek medical attention and notify them of your area of work.	Low
<b>Water borne diseases</b>	Bites/ stings/ infection	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Be aware of where and how these disease can be caught and take precautions based on this knowledge. Ensure that cuts on hands are covered with waterproof plasters and carefully clean and cover any new cuts or grazes. Wear protective clothing such as gloves. Avoid ingestion of water. Ensure that hands are washed after contact with water especially before eating or smoking. If feeling unwell after a site visit, seek medical attention and notify them of your area of work.	Low

HAZARD	RISK	People at risk	Risk rating (low, medium, high)	Precautions / Controls	Risk after controls (low, medium, high)
<b>Sharp grasses and thorny bushes</b>	Eye injuries, lacerations, cuts, infection	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Do not bend down or kneel in areas of known sharp grasses/plants. Disinfect any lacerations or punctures.	Low
<b>Concealed holes/ ditches</b>	Physical injury, ankle injuries	Site users including surveyors	High	Take care when walking through areas of dense vegetation or areas where there is poor footing visibility – avoid these areas where possible.	Medium
<b>Adverse weather</b>	Physical injury, death	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Check the weather forecast before site visits. If you are on site and adverse weather starts (such as lightening strikes) retreat to your vehicle and wait it out. Stop work immediately if ill attired for weather conditions.	Low
<b>Exposure to sun</b>	Sun burn	Site users including surveyors	High	Apply sunscreen and avoid the midday sun if possible. Wear appropriate clothing: long sleeves/trousers/hat. Plan regular breaks and shade if working for duration in full sun.	Medium
<b>Cold</b>	Hypothermia	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Wear appropriate clothing. Thermals and waterproofs.	Low
<b>Heat</b>	Exhaustion, dehydration	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Walking difficult terrain will cause extra fatigue in hot weather. Do not rush and drink plenty of water.	Low
<b>Ponds/ deep water</b>	Drowning	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Take care when near any water bodies. Do not lone work near deep/unknown standing water bodies where possible. Wear a lifejacket when working in/near deep water.	Low
<b>Floating mats of vegetation</b>	Drowning	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Avoid all areas where floating mats of vegetation grow out over deeper water or mud.	Low



HAZARD	RISK	People at risk	Risk rating (low, medium, high)	Precautions / Controls	Risk after controls (low, medium, high)
<b>Steep slopes / unstable ground</b>	Physical injury, trips, ankle injuries	Site users including surveyors	High	Try to avoid climbing steep slopes. Take care with footing on unstable ground.	Medium
<b>Slips/trips</b>	Physical injury, death	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Do not move quickly when working in and around water. If you are unsure of depth check with a depth pole/net handle before proceeding. Use safe access points, avoiding steep banks and floating mats of vegetation.	Low
<b>Deep silt</b>	Sinking and getting stuck	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Always check your footing with a depth pole/handle of net before moving into water.	Low
<b>Difficult terrain</b>	Physical injury, trips, falls, exhaustion	Site users including surveyors	Medium	If working in mountains or moorlands wear footwear with good ankle support. Carry warm, waterproof clothing. Carry a map and compass and know how to use them. Carry a whistle, torch and where appropriate, a survival bag with extra high-energy food supplies.	Low
<b>Sharp objects</b>	Cuts, lacerations, infection	Site users including surveyors	High	Take care when picking up any potentially sharp objects. Wear gloves if appropriate.	Medium
<b>Old and partially buried structures</b>	Tripping, ankle injuries	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Take care when footing is not clearly visible. Look for signs of nearby structures; e.g. partially collapsed fence.	Low
<b>Hazardous waste / fly tipping</b>	Cuts, lacerations, infection, chemical burns	Site users including surveyors	Low	Do not handle waste. Wear gloves if you have to handle waste. If unsure of contents of containers or if known to be hazardous contact emergency services.	Low

HAZARD	RISK	People at risk	Risk rating (low, medium, high)	Precautions / Controls	Risk after controls (low, medium, high)
<b>Motorcycles / horses being ridden recklessly</b>	Physical injury through collision	Site users including surveyors	Low	Always be alert when walking in areas of poor visibility that may be used by motorbikes or horses. Leave site if unsure. Wear high visibility clothing.	Low
<b>Assault</b>	Physical injury, (sexual) assault	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Try to defuse any potentially confrontational situations. If possible walk away. Contact police if unsure or you feel threatened. If you are working alone make sure someone close to you knows your location at all times and check in with them when you arrive and leave the site. Report any abusive landowners to the project team immediately.	Low
<b>Shooting</b>	Physical injury	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Do not approach any person suspected of carrying a weapon, contact police. If there is shooting allowed on site, establish where and when so you can avoid it, if possible, wear high visibility clothing in countryside areas where shooting is likely.	Low
<b>Military Ordnance</b>	Physical injury, loss of limbs	Site users including surveyors	High in Military areas	Do not pick up any unknown objects. Take care when walking off paths. Avoid getting too close to any fire ranges. Liaise with MOD if unsure.	Medium
<b>Fire fighting and explosion</b>	Burning, smoke inhalation, death	Site users including surveyors	Low	Do not tackle fire unless you need to in order to escape and it is safe to do so, call emergency services.	Low
<b>Manual Handling</b>	Physical injuries, strains, sprains	Site users including surveyors	High	Do not underestimate an objects weight – remember wet/water filled objects are a lot heavier than the dry/empty counterparts. Plan each lift – load, route, location, people. Always lift with your legs. Ask for assistance and use aids wherever possible.	Low
<b>Traffic</b>	Collision with vehicles	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Take care when crossing roads.	Low

HAZARD	RISK	People at risk	Risk rating (low, medium, high)	Precautions / Controls	Risk after controls (low, medium, high)
<b>Flooding</b>	Physical injury, death	Site users including surveyors	Low	Check for flood warnings with local news and national weather centres before visiting a site likely to flood, especially after a spell of heavy rain – do not conduct lone working at flooded sites, an onsite buddy and safety rope must be used.	Low
<b>Exposure to toxic water</b>	Medical reaction	Site users including surveyors	Medium	If toxic blooms or polluted water is suspected (dead animals or livestock, chemical odour etc) do not enter or touch the water and report it to the Environment Agency as soon as possible.	Low
<b>Lone Working</b>	Lack of assistance in case of an emergency	Site users including surveyors	Medium	Avoid lone working if possible. Carry a charged mobile phone, a map/GPS, a torch, a whistle and a watch whenever you are lone working outside. Make a local buddy aware of location and stay in touch with them on arrival and departure from sites. Avoid confrontation situations. Take precautions against risk situations.	Low

**Notes:** By accepting to survey for PondNet and Freshwater Habitats Trust it is assumed that this risk assessment has been read, and that you will take all possible care to assess and avoid the hazards listed and perform the survey in a safe manner.

If any incidents, accidents or near-accidents occur during the course of your voluntary work for Freshwater Habitats Trust, please ensure you contact the project team as soon as possible.

## Contact

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