

BBS Southern Group – Health and Safety Risk Assessment and Advice for Field Meetings

Based on BBS Safety Code – see <https://www.britishebryologicalsociety.org.uk/the-society/governance/safety-code/>

Last updated: 17 October 2025

It is the policy of the BBS to do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the safety of members and guests attending field meetings and of third parties who might be affected by BBS activities. This Health and Safety document outlines the main risks that might be encountered during field meetings and actions that should be taken to reduce and avoid these risks. Whilst every care has been taken to identify all potential significant risks, this is a guidance document only and you should be aware that you may encounter unexpected risks that are not outlined below. Please ensure that you have read the BBS Safety Code (attached at the end of this document) and are aware of the actions you should take to be responsible for your own safety. **It is the duty of all participants to practice extreme care and common sense and not to take risks.** Please read the following risk assessment and safe working practices carefully. If any points are unclear then seek clarification from the meeting leader or organiser.

Please book with the leader before attending a field meeting so that you can be notified in case of a cancellation. Make a note of the leader's mobile phone number to be used if you become lost, or experience health problems or other difficulties during the meeting. Note, however, that meetings may be held in areas of poor mobile phone coverage (e.g. much of the New Forest), so please follow the advice to stay in visual and audible contact with at least one other member of the group whilst on a field meeting.

General risk assessment

Hazard	Control measures and advice	Risk without control measure		Risk with control measure	
		Severity of hazard	Likelihood of hazard occurring	Severity of hazard	Likelihood of hazard occurring
Risk of transmitting infections and diseases to other participants, including Covid, flu, etc.	Do not attend field meetings if you have Covid, influenza or other infection which could potentially cause serious health issues to others.	High	Medium	Low	Low
Injury or death due to collision with vehicles when crossing roads or walking on pavements/verges	Avoid looking at bryophytes on verge edges of busy roads. Take care when crossing roads. Front and rear members of group to wear safety vests if walking on roads for any distance. Verbal warnings to be given.	High	Low	High	Low

Hazard	Control measures and advice	Risk without control measure		Risk with control measure	
		Severity of hazard	Likelihood of hazard occurring	Severity of hazard	Likelihood of hazard occurring
Accident or injury from trips, slips and falls due to holes, hidden obstacles, wet ground, etc.	Use walking aid if needed. Warnings of site specific risks to be given at start of meeting. Warn other members of the group of trip hazards, etc. encountered while walking.	High	Medium	High	Low
Minor injuries through contact with vegetation or man-made objects	Carry first aid kit to attend to minor injuries.	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
Bites, stings and cuts from insects, etc.	Use insect repellent if required.	Medium	Low	Medium	Low
Lyme Disease	Check and remove any ticks on clothes or body after meeting. If symptoms occur indicative of Lyme Disease seek medical advice (see below). Verbal warning to be given to any participant not familiar with Lyme Disease.	High	Low	High	Low
Leptospirosis (Weil's disease), Cryptosporidium and other diseases caused by indirect contact with rats, cattle, etc.	Wash hands or use antiseptic gel or wipes before eating, particularly if handling mosses growing on riverbanks and pond margins.	High	Low	Medium	Low
Discomfort or infection through direct or indirect contact with dog faeces.	Be vigilant when searching for bryophytes around car parks and next to well-used footpaths. Wash hands and/or use antiseptic gel or wipes after handling bryophytes collected from these areas.				
Abuse or assault from members of the public	Be polite to members of the public and take the opportunity to explain the work of BBS members.	High	Low	High	Low
Injury (and death) from attack by wild, feral or domestic animals, including livestock	Do not approach potentially dangerous animals. Take advice from landowner on whether any livestock need to be avoided.	High	Low	Medium	Low
Losing direction, getting lost (may exacerbate other hazards)	Stay within sight and earshot of other members of the group at all times. Let leader know if you intend to be out of sight or will depart early. If you find yourself lost stay where you are, attempt to contact the leader by mobile phone and wait to be found (or return to meeting point if you are sure of the route back).	Medium	Low to medium (site dependent)	Low	Low

Hazard	Control measures and advice	Risk without control measure		Risk with control measure	
		Severity of hazard	Likelihood of hazard occurring	Severity of hazard	Likelihood of hazard occurring
Hypothermia or drowning due to immersion in cold water or drowning	Be careful when inspecting pond margins and stream banks, especially in wet weather when ground conditions are slippery. Maintain balance and a firm footing at all times. Do not attempt to inspect steep banks of ponds or streams where there is deep water and a risk of falling in. Do not inspect streamsides out of sight or earshot of other members of the group.	Medium to high	Low	Medium to high	Low
Illness or discomfort due to exposure to wind, rain or other adverse weather conditions	Be prepared for all types of weather when travelling to meetings. Wear appropriate clothing during meetings.	High	Low	Medium	Low
Conditions related to extreme weather conditions (sunburn, heat exhaustion, hypothermia, injury or death from wind-blown trees and limbs, etc.)	Check weather forecast prior to meeting. Cancel or curtail meeting in cases of extreme weather.	Medium to high	Medium to high	Medium to high	Low

Safe working practices

Recommended equipment:

- First aid kit
- Antiseptic wipes or gel
- Mobile phone (fully charged)
- Waterproof clothing
- Warm clothing
- Drinking water
- Suitable footwear with correct level of support for terrain
- Survival bag (when working in exposed upland areas)

Pre-site checks:

- Check with the leader, local meetings secretary and/or Health and Safety officer before visiting site as to any specific hazards at the site.
- Ensure that you are aware of any parking restrictions at the site you are visiting.
- Ensure that your mobile phone is in working order and that a signal can be received at the site.
- Ensure you have suitable physical fitness for the site.
- Tetanus vaccination should be up to date.
- Ensure you are familiar with prevention measures and symptoms of Leptospirosis (Weil's disease), Lyme disease and Cryptosporidium.
- Check weather forecasts, especially when visiting exposed sites.
- Make sure the group you are working with are aware of any health issues/allergies that you may suffer from.

On-site safe practice:

- Work in pairs or larger groups and do not work alone.
- Select appropriate footpaths/route with care.
- Take care/avoid working near the edge of cliffs, quarries or ledges and steep slopes. These edges may be unstable and/or undercut.
- Take care/avoid unstable substrates, edges of water-bodies, soft mud/sand etc.
- Take care when walking across site and check for hazards such as rabbit holes and debris.
- Wear gloves on sites where broken glass or metal fragments are likely and in areas of bramble or other overgrown vegetation.
- Use gates where possible. If this is not possible, take care when climbing fences or walls.
- Take care of eyes/wear goggles when working in undergrowth to prevent scratches to eyes.
- Keep away from wasp's nests, or similar natural hazards. If allergic to stings do not enter the area.
- Take care on uneven slopes, especially where vegetation is dense.
- Wear suitable warm or waterproof clothing in cold or wet conditions.
- Wear sun protection where necessary, particularly in the summer and drink sufficient fluids to prevent dehydration.
- To reduce the potential to pick up ticks, avoid exposing bare skin to vegetation by tucking trousers into socks, tucking tops into trousers and wearing long sleeves; avoid sitting or lying on vegetation.
- Check body carefully for ticks the night following fieldwork and carefully remove any ticks found.
- Stay out of fields with bulls or other unpredictable animals.
- Take care in fields with livestock and don't bring dogs. Avoid getting between cows and their calves. Avoid livestock that behave aggressively, nervously or erratically. Move away slowly if livestock behave aggressively but keep the animals in your line of sight.

• If working in upland areas then participants should be competent at navigation in poor visibility. • Do not go underground. • Retreat from fires and report them to appropriate authorities. Do not attempt to tackle fires. • Retreat from exposed conditions and dangerous sites in high winds. • Check weather forecast and avoid working thundery conditions where this is a possibility of lightning. Do not shelter under lone trees.
• Working in or near water: • Do not enter fast flowing or deep water. If you are unsure of water conditions, do not enter the waterbody. • Do not work alone when in and around water. • Carry compass and map and/or GPS device and know how to use them. • Choose a route to avoid crossing waterbodies where possible. • Assess whether access points to water are safe to use. Check bank condition and slope and any additional hazards. • Assess bank conditions and determine whether safety line required or if not safe to access water. • Check water depth (e.g. using depth gauge, pole or plumb line). • Check water flow and determine whether safe to enter water. • Check substrate in waterbody and determine whether safe to enter water and whether safety line required. • Ensure Personal Floatation Device is used where there is a risk of falling into water. • Take care on slippery rocks at the waterbody edge or submerged within the waterbody (may not be visible from surface). • Take care when using electrical appliances (such as mobile phones) when working within water. Ideally use a waterproof casing for any electrical devices. • Do not get cold whilst working in water – take breaks to warm up or swap with a colleague. • Always face upstream in rivers. • Take care to avoid submerged structures and debris.
Personal hygiene: • Wash hands, especially before eating or drinking, using antiseptic wipes or hand gel. • Consider wearing gloves if working in areas where there may be a high risk of contracting diseases such as Leptospirosis or Cryptosporidium e.g. area with rat urine or stagnant water. • Cover any open cuts or grazes with a waterproof dressing or gloves. • Check body carefully for ticks the night following fieldwork. Remove ticks immediately using a tick removing tool or tweezers. Ensure that all of the tick is removed.
Post-site visit: • If symptoms of Leptospirosis (e.g. temperature of or above 38C, severe joint pain - particularly in calf muscles, headache and chills) develop then seek medical advice. • If symptoms of Lyme disease (e.g. rash around tick bite site, fatigue, chills, fever, headache, aching muscles and joints, stiff neck, swollen glands) develop then seek medical advice. • If symptoms of Cryptosporidium (e.g. gastrointestinal illness, diarrhoea) develop then seek medical advice. <u>This is an indication of symptoms only; symptoms may take as long as 30 days to develop and vary between patients. Participants must be familiar with the possible symptoms of these diseases and know when to seek medical advice.</u>

BBS Safety Code Policy

See: britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk/the-society/governance/safety-code/

Policy

It is the policy of the BBS to do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the safety of members and guests attending meetings and of third parties who might be affected by BBS activities. In pursuance of this policy, your attention is drawn to the following points and your co-operation is requested in exercising a high level of care.

Organisation of meetings

The BBS will, through its Council, draw the attention of local secretaries to the following:

- The risks faced in visiting any field site must be assessed carefully and conveyed to all participants. These risks may include such things as the possibility of extreme weather conditions or the occurrence of loose boulders, industrial or agricultural chemicals, mine shafts, cliffs, concealed pools or wells, spoil heaps liable to subsidence, shooting rights, etc.
- Permission to visit a site to which there is not open access must be obtained in advance.
- Permission to collect must be obtained in advance. If its granting is withheld for any reason, or if restrictions on quantity are imposed, then all participants must be notified.
- Participants must be notified of the type of protective clothing required for each excursion. They must also be advised of the need for compass, whistle, spare food, first-aid kit, etc., as appropriate in remote locations.
- If a field trip to a hazardous and/or remote site is planned, details of departure, the proposed itinerary and expected duration should be left at the headquarters.
- You must satisfy yourself that all participants have returned at the end of the excursion or, alternatively, you must be satisfied that someone else has been appointed to check the safe return of another member of the party.
- You should familiarise yourself with the procedure to adopt in the event of an accident in the field.
- When organising laboratory work, ensure that all participants know how to use the kind of microscopes, etc., available, thereby minimising the risk of damage to equipment.
- If a deputy acts for you, it is your responsibility to see that this safety code is made available to him or her.

Participation in meetings

The BBS will, through the local secretary, draw your attention to the points listed above. It is the duty of all participants to practice extreme care and common sense and not to take risks. The following points are particularly important in taking ultimate responsibility for your own safety:

- Ensure that you are adequately clothed and equipped.
- Never leave the main party without notifying the leader of your plans
- Pay particular attention to the hazards of the terrain and their potential danger, as a result of your actions, to others. For example, be careful not to dislodge loose stones and boulders.
- Do not rock-climb without experience and the proper equipment
- Do not damage walls, fences, hedges, gates, etc.
- Leave gates open/shut as the party finds them.
- Take care not to start a fire.
- Familiarise yourself with the procedure to adopt in the event of an accident in the field.

Clothing and equipment

Always carry windproof and waterproof outer clothing and wear suitable footwear, e.g. walking boots or, in certain circumstances, wellingtons. All clothing should be suitable for the job and for the worst potential weather. Carry sufficient food and drink for the excursion, with some extra in case of emergency. A first aid kit is also advisable. In mountains, the following are necessary:

- Two warm, long-sleeved sweaters of wool or similar material.
- Properly fitting walking or climbing boots with commando-type or Vibram soles, worn over suitable woollen socks. Footwear should be waterproof but rubber boots should not be worn.
- A rucksack with spare sweater and (if not being worn) anorak/cagoule and overtrousers.
- A whistle, compass, maps, torch, first aid kit.
- A survival bag if more than half an hour from the nearest inhabited place.

Procedure in the event of an accident in the field

First aid must be rendered at once, and medical and relief help should be sought if necessary. Prevention of exposure is almost always possible, through adequate clothing, equipment and procedure but, if a case is suspected, the initial treatment is additional warm clothing and a windproof or waterproof outer garment, plus ingestion of a source of rapidly-absorbed food such as sugar or glucose in solid or liquid form, preferably hot liquid.

The international distress code in mountains

SIX long flashes/blasts/shouts/waves in succession, repeated at 1 minute intervals.