

New Forest Biodiversity Forum

New Forest Volunteer Ecological Surveyor Programme (VESPA)

2026 Volunteer Information Pack

Introduction

The New Forest Biodiversity Forum co-ordinates the New Forest Volunteer Ecological Surveyor Programme (VESPA), which aims to increase the quantity and quality of biological data collected from the New Forest National Park, and to increase the capacity and capability of the local community to help collect these data. Further information about VESPA can be found [here](#).

VESPA is open to anyone seeking to survey and record species in the New Forest. We provide training activities and other events that are suitable for beginners with little or no prior experience, and by removing administrative barriers we also facilitate experienced independent ecological surveyors seeking to conduct fieldwork in the New Forest.

This Volunteer Information Pack contains important information that must be read by all registered VESPA participants prior to commencing fieldwork.

Volunteer Agreement

The VESPA co-ordinators will ensure that registered VESPA participants are:

- provided with sufficient information to conduct field-based surveys safely and effectively
- able to access appropriate training and resources
- provided with regular feedback on the results of VESPA surveys

As NFBF hosting partner, Wild New Forest will provide the following insurance cover for registered VESPA participants:

- £10M Public Liability Insurance, which is a requirement of anyone undertaking work on the New Forest Crown Lands and provides cover against injury, loss, or damage caused to any third party and their property arising from acts of negligence by VESPA co-ordinators or participants
- £10M Employers Liability Insurance, which provides cover against claims by VESPA participants arising from accidental injury, illness, or death while undertaking VESPA activities

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Registered VESPA volunteers agree to the following:

- I have read and understand the information provided in this information pack, including the appended policies and risk assessment.
- I understand that VESPA activities are outdoors and often some distance from the nearest human contact (including mobile phone reception), and that I am fit and healthy enough to carry out the required activities.
- I agree to inform the VESPA co-ordinators of any relevant medical conditions or special requirements.
- If I am under 18, I understand that I must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.
- I agree to read and respect the [New Forest Code](#) and the [New Forest Water Code](#) and to respect other forest users.
- I agree to follow any signage or instruction provided by Forestry England staff or contractors, and will check the forest operations pages [here](#) prior to planning surveys.
- I agree that I will print and carry a copy of this information pack with me when conducting VESPA fieldwork and will provide it as evidence that I am a registered VESPA participant if requested by Forestry England staff.
- If accessing the New Forest by car I agree to only park in designated Forestry England car parks; a map of these car parks (including the five car parks with toilets) is [here](#).
- I understand that I am responsible for the payment of any required travel and subsistence costs, and any survey equipment costs.
- I understand that a separate Forestry England permit will be required if I intend to leave survey equipment unattended on the New Forest Crown Lands.
- I understand that my VESPA registration may not be renewed if I cannot provide evidence of active engagement in the programme by the end of the calendar year.
- I consent to my personal details being held by Wild New Forest as hosting partners of the New Forest Biodiversity Forum, including in electronic form, while I am a registered VESPA participant.

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VESPA co-ordinators

The contact details of the VESPA co-ordinators are provided below, and should be the first point of contact for any issues, complaints, or feedback relating to VESPA activities:

Christine Sams
Tel: 07747 848920
Email: christine@wildnewforest.org.uk

Prof Russell Wynn
Tel: 07500 990808
Email: russ@wildnewforest.org.uk

Policies

Below are the relevant policies that are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of VESPA participants, followed by the VESPA fieldwork risk assessment.

Safeguarding policy

- VESPA is committed to ensuring that VESPA co-ordinators, trainers, and surveyors, and their associated activities, do no harm to children, young people, or vulnerable adults (hereafter termed vulnerable people).
- VESPA activities are restricted to ecological surveys and associated training events in public places - although these activities are not specifically targeted at vulnerable people, it is recognised that vulnerable people may be participating in these activities or may be impacted by them.
- VESPA participants under the age of 18 must be accompanied by (and are the responsibility of) an adult/guardian.
- All VESPA group activities, e.g. training sessions, will be attended by a VESPA co-ordinator, who will make themselves known to all participants and who will ensure proper procedures are followed, e.g. permissions for taking group photos.
- VESPA trainers will be provided with a briefing by the VESPA co-ordinators prior to commencing any engagement with participants, and this briefing will include specific information about safeguarding that is tailored to the activity/group.
- VESPA participants should report any safeguarding concerns to the VESPA co-ordinators asap.

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- Any VESPA participants who are proven to have harassed, assaulted or abused another person, either sexually, physically, or emotionally, or who have condoned, ignored, or participated in abusive, illegal, or discriminatory behaviour, may be removed from the programme and may be reported to the relevant authorities.

Lone working policy

- Always let someone else (partner/colleague) know where you are going and your estimated start/finish times and provide an update via text when you arrive and depart the site.
- Have an agreed plan for a situation whereby you do not return home as planned.
- Carry a mobile phone with sufficient battery and with GPS enabled and a suitable mapping app installed (we recommend [Ordnance Survey Maps](#)) and/or carry a paper OS map.
- Be aware that many areas of the New Forest have little or no phone signal - carry a whistle as a back-up if you require help (use three or six short blasts in quick succession every minute as a distress call).
- Be particularly careful about accessing wetland areas with deep water and bogs.
- Try to avoid lone working at night; participants involved in nocturnal moth and bat surveys should sign up to the appropriate WhatsApp group and work in pairs or small groups wherever possible.

Emergency procedures

- Be aware of your nearest exit point (e.g. road, gate, car park) when planning and preparing your survey, especially if you will be operating in remote areas.
- In the event of an emergency, keep calm, deal with the immediate situation and alert the appropriate emergency services (dial 999) if required.
- Alert the VESPA co-ordinators in case of a medical emergency involving a VESPA participant as they may have access to relevant medical information.
- Please capture any pertinent information relating to the emergency and provide this to the VESPA co-ordinators asap.

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VESPA - fieldwork risk assessment

Activity or operation: Ecological surveys and training activities on New Forest Crown Lands		
Date of latest revision: 27/02/26		Date of Activity/Operation: 01/01/25 – 31/12/29
Groups at risk: VESPA surveyors(s)		
Hazards	Risk	Risk control measures
Lone working	Lack of assistance in case of an emergency.	Inform colleague/partner of survey location and timing and sign in/out by text; all lone surveyors to carry mobile phone with GPS and with sufficient charge.
Travel to/from survey site	Injury or death	Utilise non-motorised, off-road transport (cycle, walk) where possible; if driving, adjust driving style according to conditions and possible presence of livestock on road; park away from hazards and avoid blocking gates or other access points.
Falling branches/trees/dead wood	Injury or death	Check weather conditions and avoid surveying under trees in strong winds; take care when walking in areas of fallen timber/brush.
Livestock, e.g. ponies, cattle	Injury from animals, i.e. being kicked, trampled or charged	Be aware of livestock in survey area and avoid close approach, especially when foals/calves are present.
Weather conditions	Adverse effect of weather on observers, e.g. heat stroke, sunburn, hypothermia	Monitor weather leading up to survey visits and check forecast immediately prior to commencement of survey; wear suitable clothing, use sun block, take sufficient food and water, and abandon survey if conditions become too adverse.
Insects, animals, and plants	Bites and stings, anaphylactic shock	Wear suitable clothing; do not approach potentially aggressive animals (including dogs); carry treatment for known allergies; wear insect repellent in midge-prone areas; carry tick removal tools.
Contact with micro-organisms, harmful bacteria and pathogens	Contraction of disease e.g. Tetanus, Leptospirosis, Lyme Disease	Ensure cuts, scratches and skin abrasions are thoroughly cleaned and covered with a waterproof plaster; for tick prevention - wear long sleeves and trousers, preferably with gaiters, check for ticks regularly, and do a full body check at end of day.
Accidents and ailments	Risk of accident or medical emergency	Take particular care when walking across, over or near stiles, bridges, and challenging terrain. Surveyors to carry mobile first aid kit, and mobile phone with GPS.
Working after dark	Risk of tripping, increased risk of getting lost	Take particular care when working after dark and avoid lone working where possible, take head torch with spare batteries; inform partner of route and timings including latest ETA; carry fully charged mobile phone with GPS.