



# Safety first

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Everyone contributing to the Waterlife Recovery Trust project is likely to be familiar with the British countryside and the potential risks involved in doing the things that are part of our everyday lives, such as taking the dog for a walk or going fishing. We minimise those risks without thinking, using experience and common sense.

That same experience and common sense will help keep you safe when visiting a mink raft, but doing so may involve some risks that are not very familiar, so it's important to be aware of these and take extra care. The advice below, and much more, can be found in a generic Risk Assessment on the WRT website, which we urge you to read: <https://www.waterliferecoverytrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Generic-Risk-Assessment-Mink-Project-Volunteers.pdf>

1. Our work invariably puts us very close to watercourses, often with steep and slippery banks, so ensure you are wearing suitable footwear (stout wellies, possibly chest waders) and, when possible, take someone else with you. Use a wading pole to check water depth and for added stability on steep banks, or for checking the substrate when working in muddy waters. Be prepared for accidental falls into water, e.g. have spare warm clothing available, carry a first aid kit and a fully charged mobile phone, in a waterproof case.

2. We are trapping small but potentially dangerous wild mammals, and there is the potential for other species to be trapped, so close contact with animals (and any diseases they may carry) may be a hazard for the unwary. Always wash your hands well after contact with animals or traps. Wear stout gloves when handling the cage and, if bitten, get the wound checked and cleaned by a health professional; be aware of the signs of Weil's disease and Lyme disease. These are not carried by mink, but may be in the waterside environment.

3. We are using air weapons which may pose an obvious risk to us, and to others nearby. Please follow the BASC safe code of practice <https://basc.org.uk/codes-of-practice/air-rifles-code-of-practice/> and WRT's Best Practice guidelines on our website <https://www.waterliferecoverytrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WRE-Best-Practice-Guidance-Firearms-Legislation-and-Safety-v2.pdf>

When working alone in remote locations, let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return; this can be your Project Officer (P.O.) or someone from your household, for example.

Your P.O. will be aware of each Remote Monitoring Device (RMD) activation, so will be expecting a report from the resultant trap visit and will check if no report is received within a reasonable time frame. These POs work for partner organisations each of which has its own risk assessment and health and safety protocols, available on request from your P.O.. They will run through the safe operating procedure when you are initially set up with a mink raft or rafts and are available to answer any questions you may have.

The above may appear daunting, but the reality is that no-one has yet been injured when volunteering to visit a WRT raft and, by providing advice and training, we intend to keep it that way!