

## LEGAL, ETHICAL, AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF WORKING IN THE FIELD

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### Abstract

Successful fieldwork, carried out at a distance from normal veterinary facilities, requires thorough planning with careful attention to detail. There are substantial legal, ethical, and practical matters involved with fieldwork that must be taken into consideration. Law relating to employment safety and liability and to animals and conservation must be considered and supplemented, where necessary, by ethical standards. Many practical matters, including documentation, equipment, personal conduct, and knowledge of the nature and locality of the fieldwork, must be researched. This article provides guidance on the legal, ethical, and practical matters involved with fieldwork. Copyright 2013 Published by Elsevier Inc.

**Key words:** animals; conservation; fieldwork; health; law; legislation; safety

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The specific context of this issue of the *Journal of Exotic Pet Medicine* is working in locations where there is limited or no access to the “standard” facilities that would be expected in a veterinary practice, clinic, or laboratory. As mentioned by other authors in this issue, this may also be a matter of experience (as discussed in the “Introduction”). To those used to ultramodern facilities and state-of-the-art equipment, a short visit to treat an exotic animal in a house, zoo, or wildlife park may feel like fieldwork. Alternatively, those who regularly work with relatively basic facilities and challenging conditions may be more resilient and already adapted, to a certain extent, to the treatment of exotic animals “in situ” (i.e., in their own environment).

Fieldwork in any context is likely to be subjected to special requirements, hazards, and risks. It is in the nature of free-living exotic animals that they are usually found in remote places and in difficult terrain and environments where problems are likely to be enhanced. Animals will have to be observed or caught, handled, and released without damage or loss. Whether the location is managed, as in a zoo or wildlife park, the nature of the animals or the techniques and equipment available are likely to call for special precautions for both fieldworkers and the animals. These factors have legal, ethical, and practical implications (Table 1).

As other authors in this issue point out, probably the most fundamental element in ensuring

that fieldwork is successful (i.e., that its primary aim is achieved and no major damage or loss is involved) is planning. To be able to work effectively and safely in situ requires special preparation with all due attention to detail. This helps to ensure that energy and resources are not wasted on the predictable, thereby diminishing reserves required for the unexpected. When fieldwork is under way, good management and adaptability are essential for the same reason.

In addition to the veterinary characteristics of fieldwork, the legal, ethical, and practical implications must be taken into consideration as part of the planning procedure and ongoing management. Many issues are similar whether the fieldwork is carried out at home or abroad, but work-

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TABLE 1. Checklist of legal, ethical, and practical considerations

Subject/Situation	Information	References and Further Reading
Planning is the key to achieving the aims of fieldwork, to comply with legal requirements, and to avoid preventable accidents or legal liability.	<p>Preparation should include the following:</p> <p>Identification of the primary purpose of the fieldwork (e.g., research, veterinary treatment, capture of an escaped animal, conservation, translocation, reintroduction of a protected species)</p> <p>A thorough assessment of all aspects of the proposed fieldwork</p> <p>Risk and threat assessments, management plans, checklists, standard operating procedures, and emergency/crisis plans</p> <p>Written records of decisions and their implementation</p> <p>Regular review and updating of decisions and implementation</p> <p>Debriefing with notes for future similar activities (written)</p> <p>These procedures may help to avoid claims of legal liability (e.g., for negligence) and to provide evidence that legislation or guidance has been followed (i.e., in providing for health and safety (H&amp;S) of workers).</p>	<p>Guidelines produced by the Overseas Group of the BVA, which provides general advice and country-specific information <a href="http://www.bva.co.uk/overseas/Working_volunteering_overseas.aspx">http://www.bva.co.uk/overseas/Working_volunteering_overseas.aspx</a></p> <p>RGS library and resources.</p> <p>Expedition database: <a href="http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Fieldwork+and+Expeditions/ExpeditionsDatabaseAndReports/Expedition+Database+and+Reports.htm">http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Fieldwork+and+Expeditions/ExpeditionsDatabaseAndReports/Expedition+Database+and+Reports.htm</a></p> <p>RGS Expedition Handbook<sup>1</sup>: <a href="http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Publications/EAC+publications/Expedition+Handbook/Expedition+Handbook.htm">http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Publications/EAC+publications/Expedition+Handbook/Expedition+Handbook.htm</a></p> <p>RGS publications in general: <a href="http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Publications/EAC+publications/Expeditions+and+Fieldwork+publications.htm">http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Publications/EAC+publications/Expeditions+and+Fieldwork+publications.htm</a></p> <p>Specialist organizations such as the British Antarctic Survey: <a href="http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/living_and_working/index.php">http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/living_and_working/index.php</a></p> <p>"Where there is no . . ." books providing for situations where professionals such as doctors, dentists, and veterinarians are not available.</p> <p>Reports and papers of relevant expeditions, projects, and other relevant fieldwork.</p> <p>Travel guides, such as the Lonely Planet or "Rough Guide to . . ." series.</p> <p>Central Intelligence Agency: <i>The World Factbook</i>: <a href="https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/">https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/</a></p> <p>Diaries, literature, and historical records.</p> <p>Personal contacts.</p> <p>Cooper and Cooper.<sup>2</sup></p>
Authorization	<p>Obtain written (or E-mail, if acceptable) rather than oral authorization but if only verbal permission is available/appropriate, make a note of content, date, and place and person authorizing. Keep files of documentation with copies in other locations for safekeeping. Make additional copies for officials to keep or as authorization for employees acting for you or your project. Some countries expect an official ink stamp (if available) as well as signature. Consider having a stamp made for the project.</p> <p>Ensure authorization is in correct name(s).</p>	

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