

# **A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COLLECTING INSECTS AND OTHER INVERTEBRATES**

## **INVERTEBRATE LINK**

**(Joint Committee for the Conservation of British Invertebrates)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Field entomologists in the UK have long supported the code for collecting that was published over thirty years ago by the (now renamed) Joint Committee for the Conservation of British Insects. The code, which was partially revised in 1987, has now been thoroughly updated. It thus takes account of developments in conservation and is applicable to all terrestrial and freshwater invertebrates; not just insects. The code, of necessity, defines certain activities that should be avoided or restricted but it equally emphasises the need to collect invertebrates in order to gain valuable information, much of which can aid conservation. The code is reproduced in full below and will also be separately published. Additionally a 'pocket' summary of the code will be published free of charge by the Forestry Commission

This Committee believes that the study of invertebrates and the formation of reference collections, complete with their inherent recorded data, are important sources of information which make a vital contribution to the conservation of the invertebrate fauna and to conservation in general. To this end, accurate identification of species is essential and often requires the examination of dead specimens.

Available evidence indicates that invertebrate populations are not generally harmed by the collection of specimens. Collecting may, however, have some potential to harm populations that are very localised or that have been seriously affected by the loss and fragmentation of habitats, caused by ever-increasing changes in land use. Such changes include the decline of traditional farmland management, urban expansion and road development.

In view of these considerations, the Committee believes that collecting should always be limited to the minimum necessary for the purpose intended, as well as by full compliance with legal requirements relating to particular sites and species. This principle is enshrined within the following code of conduct, together with guidance on the safeguarding of collections and associated data.

The Committee acknowledges the restraint that is already exercised by most people who study invertebrates in the field. Furthermore it believes that, by subscribing to this code, they can show themselves to be a concerned and responsible body of committed naturalists who wish to maximise the value of their data for conservation.

### **1.0 Collecting—General**

- 1.1 No more specimens than are strictly required for a specific purpose should be captured or killed. Remember that even an apparently common species may be locally vulnerable.
- 1.2 Individuals of readily identified species, particularly butterflies, should not be killed, nor removed from the wild, unless required as voucher specimens or for scientific or educational study. If they are not needed for

such purposes, they should be examined while alive and then released near the place of capture.

- 1.3 If the accumulation of scientific data is not a specific aim, consideration should be given to photography as an alternative to collecting, especially for macrolepidoptera.
- 1.4 Species that do not occur in abundance should not be taken year after year from the same locality.
- 1.5 Specimens for exchange or disposal to other entomologists should be taken sparingly, and preferably not at all.
- 1.6 Invertebrates should not be collected from the wild for sale or other commercial purposes, including the manufacture of jewellery, or for purely ornamental display.
- 1.7 If specimens are sold from captive-bred stock or from old collections, they should be accompanied by data, including details of provenance.
- 1.8 When obtaining early stages by collecting leaf-mines, galls, seed heads etc., never take all that can be found. Leave as many as possible to allow the population to survive.
- 1.9 Do as little damage to the habitat as possible.
- 1.10 Adequate records, as indicated in article 5.1, should always be kept.
- 1.11 Collections should be properly housed, so as to prevent deterioration or damage by pests.
- 1.12 The future value of every collection should be safeguarded. The owner's will should provide for the appointment of a scientific executor, who can offer the collection to a learned society or a museum.

## **2.0 Collecting—Rare, Local and Endangered Species**

- 2.1 It is illegal to collect certain listed invertebrate species or forms except under licence from the relevant authority<sup>1</sup>. Other taxa listed as being of 'Conservation Concern' should not be collected except with the utmost restraint<sup>2</sup>. A pair of specimens of any such taxon should be considered sufficient for a personal collection. Species in greatest danger should not be collected at all for this purpose.

---

<sup>1</sup> In Great Britain, these taxa are protected under Section 9 (1) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) and are listed within Schedule 5 of the Act. The licensing authority at the time of writing is DEFRA; applications can be made via the national conservation agencies (e.g. English Nature). The authority for Northern Ireland is the Environment & Heritage Service of DoE(NI).

<sup>2</sup> Such taxa are listed in CITES schedules, Biodiversity Action Plans, Red Data Books and reviews of nationally or locally notable species, as updated on the websites of UK government conservation agencies: e.g. [www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk) and [www.citesuk.gov.uk](http://www.citesuk.gov.uk)

The taking of larger or annually repeated samples may, however, be justifiable for *bona fide* scientific study, if it can be reasonably expected to have no damaging effects on the population.

- 2.2 The collection of rare or local species from sites where they are already known to occur does not generally provide useful data and should be avoided, except for the purpose of survey or other scientific study.
- 2.3 Newly discovered localities for rare species should be reported to the appropriate conservation organisations, records centres and organisers of recording schemes (see 5.2).

### 3.0 Collecting—Trapping

- 3.1 The catch in a trap should be released after being examined, except for any specimens that must be killed for voucher purposes or for an ecological or other scientific study. The release should be made in the same locality, but away from the immediate trap site. The catch should preferably be kept in cool shady conditions and then released at dusk. If this is not possible, it should be released in long grass, or other cover; not on lawns or other exposed surfaces.

Anaesthetics are harmful and should not be used.

- 3.2 Live trapping, for instance in traps filled with egg-tray material, is always to be preferred to the killing of the catch.
- 3.3 Unwanted invertebrates should not be fed to fish, birds or other animals.
- 3.4 If a trap used for scientific purposes is found to be catching rare or local species unnecessarily, it should be re-sited.
- 3.5 Traps and lights should be sited with care so as not to annoy or confuse other people or to waste police time.

### 4.0 Collecting—Permissions and Conditions

- 4.1 Always seek permission from the landowner or occupier before collecting on private land. Obtain appropriate permit(s) for access and/or collecting on any site controlled by a conservation body, such as a county wildlife trust, local authority, the national conservation agency, Forest Enterprise or National Trust. (Collecting on a Site of Special Scientific Interest requires permission both from the owner and from the local office of the appropriate national conservation agency.<sup>3</sup>)
- 4.2 Always comply with any conditions laid down by the granting of access and the permission to collect.
- 4.3 Always report your findings to the person who gave you permission, at least by commenting orally on the ecological requirements of a few species of interest. Findings from a nature reserve or other important site should be sent to the appropriate authority in the form of a list of the species recorded, annotated with habitat data.

---

<sup>3</sup> In Great Britain these agencies are: English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and Countryside Council for Wales.

## 5.0 Recording—General

- 5.1 Full and relevant data should be kept together with all specimens retained; i.e. as attached data labels in the case of dry mounted collections. These data may be repeated and amplified in databases, notebooks and other media.
- 5.2 Species lists, together with any other data, should always be lodged with the relevant county and national recording schemes<sup>4</sup>. If possible, the data should be entered on a database compatible with the National Biodiversity Network.

## 6.0 Collecting—Protecting the Environment

- 6.1 Protect habitats and remember the interests of other naturalists. Avoid harm to nesting vertebrates and to vegetation, particularly rare or fragile plants.
- 6.2 When ‘beating’ trees or shrubs for invertebrates, do not thrash leaves or twigs so as to cause damage; a sharp jarring of branches is normally sufficient and more effective.  
 Searching for larvae, rather than indiscriminate beating, should be considered as more environmentally friendly and giving more insight into the lifestyles of the species concerned.
- 6.3 When coleopterists (or others) work dead wood or bark, they should leave a substantial proportion untouched in the locality. Where practicable, detached bark and worked material should be replaced.
- 6.4 Overturned stones and logs should be gently replaced in their original positions unless very deeply embedded.
- 6.5 Damage to aquatic habitats from over-vigorous use of water nets or kick sampling should be avoided. Water-weed and moss which have been worked for invertebrates should be replaced, together with the unwanted animals. Plant material that has been left by site managers in litter heaps should be replaced and not scattered about.
- 6.6 ‘Sugar’ should never be applied to tree trunks or other surfaces where it could harm lichens or other epiphytes or where it would be unsightly. ‘Wine ropes’ should be used in preference to sugar patches.
- 6.7 Uprooting plants or digging up turf without permission from the landowner is generally illegal in the UK and should not be done. Certain plant species, which are listed as fully protected by law, should not be picked or collected in any way without an appropriate licence.  
 For invertebrates in short turf, damage to the habitat can be avoided and the efficiency of sampling improved by the use of a ‘suction sampler’.
- 6.8 Litter from vertebrate nests or roosts should be collected only in compliance with the laws applying to the species concerned.
- 6.9 Follow the Country Code and comply with all bylaws that apply to the site concerned.

---

<sup>4</sup> Relevant schemes and databases may be listed on invertebrate conservation websites.

## 7.0 Rearing and Breeding

- 7.1 If obtaining breeding stock of scarce species, try to do so from captive colonies that have already been successfully established, rather than from wild-caught sources.
- 7.2 No more larvae or other livestock should be collected from the wild than can be adequately fed and maintained in captivity.
- 7.3 Bred or reared invertebrates that are surplus to requirements should not, without consultation as defined in Article 7.4, be released into the wild, except back into their parental population. Large numbers should not be released even into a parental population if it is small and localised.

Surplus invertebrates that, according to Article 7.4, are not suitable for release should if possible be offered to others with a relevant interest.

The above guidance, which is based on genetic and ecological considerations, refers to native taxa. It is illegal in the UK to release any non-native invertebrate into the wild, except under special licence from the relevant government agency<sup>5</sup>.

- 7.4 The establishment of a new population or the attempted reinforcement of an existing one should not be undertaken except within a well-prepared, ecologically sound programme; this must be sanctioned by the appropriate conservation agencies, notified to the relevant recording schemes and local organisations and agreed with the owner or occupier of the site(s) concerned. Also consult "Insect Re-establishment—a code of Conservation Practice" issued by the Committee.

The guidelines in 7.3 and 7.4 include precautionary measures to avoid the adverse effects of releasing potentially deleterious genes into recipient populations.

## 8.0 Health and Safety, Insurance etc.

- 8.1 All collectors and surveyors should look after their own safety and that of anyone else who may be affected by what they are doing. Formal risk assessments may be required by site owners or commissioners of surveys.
- 8.2 If any activity might cause suspicion or confusion (e.g. the use of light traps in certain localities), the relevant authorities, such as the police or coastguard, should be notified beforehand.

All those involved in fieldwork, especially organised events, should be aware or made aware of their liabilities for personal injury or damage to property. Appropriate insurance cover should be obtained if necessary.

First published 1969; second edition, May 1987.

This edition was drafted with the help of contributions and advice from K.N. Alexander, N.A.D. Bourn, O.D. Cheesman, P.J. Hodge, R.A. Jones, R.S. Key, D. Lonsdale, M.G. Morris, J. Muggleton, M. Parsons, J.W. Phillips, A.J. Pickles, A.E. Stubbs and M. Willing.

---

<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing, the relevant UK agencies are DEFRA (for England and Wales) and its counterparts in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

A summary of this code is published free of charge by the Forestry Commission Research Agency, Alice Holt Lodge, Wrecclesham, Farnham, Surrey GU10 4LH (Tel. 01420 22255)

### **INVERTEBRATE LINK**

**(Joint Committee for the Conservation of British Invertebrates)**

c/o Royal Entomological Society, 41 Queen's Gate, LONDON SW7 5HR  
(Tel. 0207 584 8361)

### **Organisations represented on Invertebrate Link**

Action for Invertebrates  
Amateur Entomologists' Society  
Balfour-Browne Club  
Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders' Association  
Bees, Wasp, and Ants Recording Society  
Biological Records Centre  
British Arachnological Society  
British Dragonfly Society  
British Entomological and Natural History Society  
British Myriapod and Isopoda Group  
Butterfly Conservation  
CABI Bioscience  
Conchological Society of Great Britain & Ireland  
Countryside Council for Wales  
Dipterists' Forum  
English Nature  
Environment Agency  
Forestry Commission (Forest Research)  
Buglife-The  
Invertebrate Conservation Trust  
Joint Nature Conservation Committee  
DEFRA  
National Trust for England, Wales and Northern Ireland  
Natural History Museum  
Royal Entomological Society  
Royal Museum of Scotland  
RSPB  
Scottish Natural Heritage  
The Wildlife Trusts