
PICKING, GATHERING & FORAGING POLICY

People often want to know what they may or may not collect on our open space sites, so here is our policy. Above all please respect nature, follow the Countryside Code¹ and always remember that anything you pick means that item will no longer be available for wildlife in the habitat or for others to enjoy. Because our sites are in densely populated areas already under “footfall pressure”, we regret that we cannot usually allow any picking or gathering on greenspace areas less than 1 hectare in size. This policy therefore generally applies only to larger sites of more than 1 hectare of open green space, not counting play areas. If you are unsure, please do check with us first because, if there are fruit trees such as apples on your site, even if it is small, we may allow you to pick from those in moderation.

We do not proscribe a little responsible gathering of “the four Fs” – Fruit, Foliage, Flowers and Fungi – on the larger open spaces we own or control, as long as it is only for reasonable private use and not for sale or any commercial purpose, but we do not allow any uprooting of any plants. Indeed, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) uprooting is illegal without our formal authorization. We may be able to grant you a permit in certain circumstances for conservation projects, but you must obtain written permission from one of our Directors or the Science Manager before you uproot anything, and we’ll ask you to submit a full proposal with justification in advance for our scientists to consider.

Please also be aware that quite a large number of plant species and some fungi are specially protected in law, for example all those listed in Schedule 8 (which is regularly reviewed) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act². Intentional picking, uprooting, destroying, trading (including parts or derivatives) of these are prohibited. It is your responsibility to ensure you know your botany and that you do not harm any of these species, either directly or incidentally. Please particularly note that “uproot” is defined as “to dig up or otherwise remove the plant from the land [or surface] on which it is growing”, whether or not it actually has roots. Also, for the purposes of the legislation, the word “plant” includes not only vascular plants, algae and bryophytes (mosses & liverworts) but also lichens, which are dual organisms, and fungi which are in fact not plants at all!



¹ See <http://bit.ly/2xoypxl>

² <http://bit.ly/2wjX2i1>

Foraging is an ancient practice with origins far back in the mists of time, but the old knowledge of how to gather without harming the plants or their productivity is being lost in the modern era. In our policy, we have tried to echo the practices of bygone days and the old herbalists by inviting you to use common sense and consider others as well as the environment. Some of our sites contain orchards or individual fruit trees (apples, pears, plums) and you are permitted to pick some of their fruit, always leaving plenty for the birds.

So please remember:

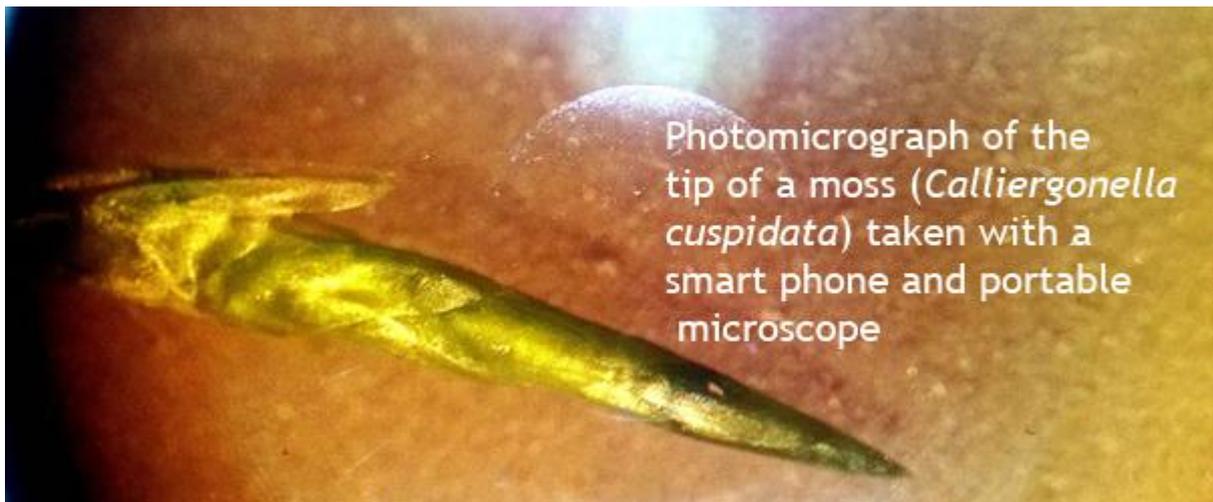
-  The aim without exception on all our sites is to promote and protect biodiversity, conserving nature and wild plants. A little picking of fruit, foliage, flowers or fungi may be acceptable on our large, wilder sites (as above) as long as the species is not specially protected, but you should remember that taking any botanical material removes its availability as a resource in the ecosystem and prevents others from enjoying it *in situ*.
-  Never gather anything unless there is plenty of the same in the area – take flowers or foliage (a small bunch) only from large patches of the plant.
-  Birds rely on berries to survive the winter months, so never pick unless fruiting is abundant and then always leave the great majority of the fruit for them.
-  Only gathering by hand (and sharp scissors or small penknife) is permitted. Maximum quantities: smaller berries and fruits (hips, haws, blackberries, sloes, elderberries, *etc.*) 1 litre per person per season; larger fruit (crab apples, damsons, chestnuts & other shelled nuts) 3 litres per person per season; mushrooms/edible fungi 2 litres per person per season; flowers, a small posy per person of not more than ten stems of any one common species (and not orchids) in any one month; foliage and decorations (nettles, herbs, mistletoe, holly, ivy, *etc.*) a 5 litre bag (or 10 litre bag for very springy material like holly) per person per season. Berrying trees and shrubs must in no way be disfigured – select small branchlets only that will not leave a noticeable gap. You may only pick for yourself, not for others.
-  Be careful not to damage other vegetation when gathering.
-  Please take care and always supervise children – many species are thorny, irritant, or **poisonous**, some extremely so, and nettles and wasps do sting! You **MUST** know what you are doing. Never pick items you cannot identify for certain. Wash anything you are going to eat thoroughly first.
-  **Fishing, hunting, trapping, shooting, coursing or any kind of animal culling are strictly forbidden on our sites.** Entomological specimens (see below) may only be collected by prior written permission signed by a Director of Betts Estates or the Science Manager. You will be asked for prior justification.



Natural History Specimen Collecting

We encourage residents and their families to take an interest in biodiversity and natural history. There are some things that can be collected without causing significant harm to the ecosystem – old snail and mollusc shells, nut husks and cones chewed by mice and squirrels, feathers (not from living birds!), clean bone fragments, common flowers for pressing/drying, fungi for spore prints, *etc.* Remember to wash your hands and read the appendix to this Policy. In general, though, we would prefer you to study items *in situ* rather than take them home. We do not allow fossil collection without prior written permission from a Director or the Science Manager.

Today's pocket microscopes, digital cameras and smart phone apps make it easy to examine specimens in the field, make records and take high quality photos. It's quite simple to log your records of time and date against a GPS location reading. We can help you with identification if you require, or we can suggest nature study projects for you or your family. Just tell us in an email what it is that interests you, and always ask us before you embark on any project that might involve you taking things off site. We are always keen to receive your records and any interesting photos. Please make a habit of copying them to us by email, with the date sighted and location.



Please note that metal detecting and prospecting of any kind is forbidden on our land. We do use surveillance and take action on any reports of persons not observing the rules and regulations.

APPENDIX - RISK OF DISEASES IN FORAGING AND FIELD STUDIES

Tetanus

There is a risk of tetanus if you come into contact with soil, particularly after it has been manured. *Clostridium tetani* Flügge, 1881 is a bacterium that enters the body through cuts and abrasions, so if you cut or wound yourself when there is contact with soil and your tetanus vaccination is not current, seek medical advice straight away. The disease affects muscles, especially facial ones (“lockjaw”) but can spread.

Blue-Green Algae

Lentic (standing or slow-moving) water, *i.e.* lakes ponds, ditches, *etc.*, can contain cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) that can be toxic if ingested, causing vomiting, diarrhoea and fever/’flu-like symptoms. Therefore, if you are going into or near water that looks mucky or over which there is a scum, do wear gloves and avoid direct contact with the water. Wash thoroughly before eating or touching your face or other parts of your body or other persons. If you feel unwell after being in or near lentic water bodies, seek medical advice.

Lyme Disease

Borrelia burgdorferi sensu lato are spirochaete bacteria species that can infect humans. It can be transmitted, though quite rarely, by the female sheep tick *Ixodes ricinus* (Linnaeus, 1758) which lives in bracken and other vegetation, especially where there are sheep and deer. Those infected suffer ‘flu-like symptoms and joint pain that may last years. Seek medical advice if you have a tick bite followed by a rash and feel unwell. In bracken and tall sheep pastures, *etc.*, use insect repellents and wear close-woven, light-coloured clothing so you can spot any ticks more easily, covering as much exposed skin as possible. When you return, check your body carefully for ticks, especially skin folds and crannies. If you find one, use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp it as close to your skin as possible where the mouthparts are, pull upward with steady, even pressure. Do not squeeze the tick’s body or jerk it so the mouthparts separate (if this happens, remove the mouthparts with the tweezers). After removal, thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with antiseptic, medical alcohol, iodine, or soap and water.

More at <http://bit.ly/24WvHhz>.

Weil’s Disease/Leptospirosis

This is caused by certain bacteria of the genus *Leptospira* carried in the urine of rats and other mammals that then enters water bodies. Humans can be infected through skin abrasions or soft mucous tissues. Symptoms are diverse but include headache, nausea, fever and muscle pain. It can be mild or serious, so minimise risk by being extremely wary of stagnant waters where there may be rats or farm animal pollution. Personal cleanliness, hand washing before eating, drinking, applying make-up, *etc.* is essential (and should be normal practice anyway after you have been out in the field). Cover any cuts or abrasions with waterproof dressings and wear gloves if you are in contact with stagnant water. Seek medical advice if you feel unwell after visiting such places.

Toxocariasis and other diseases from animal faeces

Toxocariasis is the parasitic disease caused by *Toxocara* roundworm larvae in animal faeces. There are two particular species that cause problems *Toxocara canis* Werner 1782 from dogs and *Toxocara cati* (Zeder, 1800) from cats. Children are most at risk through close contact with pets and a child’s propensity to touch, lick and smell everything around them. There are other parasites and infections that can be passed on from animal faeces and urine, so keep up the personal hygiene, always clear up after your pet, keep children away from areas that pets may have soiled and seek medical advice for any unusual symptoms.

This is a huge subject and one in which much research continues. Diseases, parasites and the organisms that carry them are all around us. Above are just a few, but the risks are not great in Britain for healthy adults with fully functional immune systems, and it is important not to be scared by microbiology which largely works for us and protects us. Children and the elderly are more vulnerable. Be sensible, wear protective clothing when necessary, maintain personal hygiene and, if you are worried, always seek advice from an appropriate medical or scientific source.

© Betts 2021

Professional service
Sustainable land management
Better planning results
Enhanced biodiversity

Head Office:
Bank House Martley
Worcester WR6 6PB UK
T: +44 (0)1886 888445
E: nature@bettsestates.com
W: www.bettsestates.com
and at local offices