

Iona Island Bird Observatory COVID-19 Exposure Control Plan (Updated August 2020)

IIBO's fall migration monitoring program will proceed in 2020 from August 26th to October 6th. As the Province of BC is in *Phase 3* of its *Restart Plan*, this protocol is being developed to guide safe work at the station. Due to the persistence of COVID-19 in the population, and particularly with recent increases in cases in the Metro Vancouver area, IIBO has developed this COVID-19 Exposure Control Plan for 2020 Operations with guidelines and modified protocols to guide staff, volunteers, and any organized groups that may arrive for work or activities at the Observatory. This plan was written in accordance with the Province of BC's COVID-19 [Orders, Notices and Guidance](#) and with the guidance of plans developed by other banding operations and organizations including the North American Banding Council (2020).

General Guidelines for all Personnel

Carpooling: Carpooling with anyone outside your bubble is strongly discouraged. Masks must be worn at all times if carpooling.

Physical Distancing: Volunteers will need to maintain physical distancing of 2 m from each other at all times. Staff are considered to be in the same "bubble" and do not need to maintain physical distancing from each other.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): All staff and volunteers should bring their own mask and carry it on their person to have readily accessible. Masks will generally not be required to be worn by staff or volunteers outdoors at the station. However, if for some reason, a close interaction is required between volunteers or volunteers and staff (e.g., for help extracting a bird, or getting a second opinion during bird processing), a mask must be worn by all parties involved.

Hygiene and Equipment Cleaning: The following sanitary supplies will need to be acquired to last duration of the banding season (if possible) or replenished regularly before they are used up:

- Hand sanitizer: separate bottles for each bander and volunteer (60% alcohol minimum). Staff and volunteers must disinfect hands:
 - Upon arriving at a worksite;
 - Before and after breaks (e.g. washroom, food or water breaks);
 - Before and after handling common items and tools (e.g., switching users of the laptop)
- Iso-propyl alcohol: for cleaning banding equipment using a spray bottle
- Sanitary wipes: enough to account for multiple cleanings of hard surfaces each day
- Non-medical masks to cover any volunteer who forgets to bring their own

Disinfect all banding equipment at the end of each session with 70% iso-propyl alcohol and clean other tools and surfaces (e.g. table tops, radios, writing utensils, etc.) using a [Health](#)

[Canada \(2020\) approved product](#) or diluted bleach solution. Wipe down the laptop surface at the end of each session and if switching users.

Volunteers

For each banding session, IIBO will only accept one beginner, two intermediate and up to five advanced volunteers.

For all volunteers:

- An online self-assessment / personal health check **is required to be completed before every shift**. The [link](#) for this will be provided in each shift reminder email.
- Contact tracing can be completed through our Better Impact shift sign-ups.
- Volunteers will be asked not to attend a session if they are:
 - Exhibiting cold or flu-like symptoms in the last 10 days such as fever, chills, new or worsening cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, and new muscle aches or headache;
 - Under the direction of the provincial health officer to self-isolate;
 - Arrived from outside of Canada in the last 14 days;
 - In close contact with someone who has a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
 - **Any volunteer or staff who feels even mildly unwell must not go to the banding station and must notify the bander as soon as they are aware that they won't be able to attend.**
- Volunteers will be encouraged to bring their own food and water, and take home any garbage.

For Beginners: We are unable to train beginner volunteers to extract or band this season; learning and building on these skills requires very close personal interactions between our staff and volunteers meaning physical distancing cannot be maintained. This also follows the North American Banding Council recommendations.

As a beginner volunteer, you will be in the banding hut with the bander entering data on a laptop. A plexi-glass barrier will be in place between you and the bander. You will be able to learn by observing the bander, and there may be opportunity to observe net extractions when it isn't too busy. Hand sanitizer will be provided for frequent sanitizing. Please bring a mask to wear at times when social distancing is not possible.

For Intermediate and Advanced: As an {intermediate / advanced} level volunteer, you will be doing net rounds and extracting birds from the nets. Only the bander and scribe will be inside the banding hut. Hand sanitizer will be provided for frequent sanitizing. Wearing a mask at all times is optional, but please bring a mask to wear during any times social distancing is not possible; for example if you need to hand over a difficult extraction.

Contingency plan: If someone who was at the station displays symptoms or tests positive, call 811 and get recommendations. The station may have to shut down for 14 days if this happens.

Modified Banding Procedures

- Banding hut: The banders (one bander at a time) and scribe volunteer will be the only personnel allowed in the hut. A plexiglass divider will be installed to create a physical barrier between the two.
- Banding: Only banding staff will band birds to minimize contact of the banding equipment by multiple people.
- Bird bag hand off – Bags with birds will either be hung inside the hut by extractors; or, hung up outside on a line and banders will subsequently bring them inside the hut. The banders have the option based on their comfort level. Ideally, no one but the banders and scribe volunteer should enter the hut. Anyone else entering the hut should wear their mask at all times. Bird bags will need to be passed between at least two people in many cases but the persistence of the virus is lower on soft surfaces like cloth than on hard surfaces. Frequent hand sanitization and not touching one's face should minimize the risk of transmission via bird bags and birds.
- Hand sanitizer – Two bottles will be kept at the banding counter and extractors should each carry a small bottle on their person.
- Extracting – Physical distancing should be maintained as much as possible during net runs. If one net has many birds, work on opposite ends. Should an extractor ever need help with a bird, they should return it carefully into the net and step back 2 m to allow the incoming extractor to take over. Should a situation arise where this is deemed unsafe for the bird and it needs to be passed over by hand, both involved extractors must put on their masks before this happens.
- Bird handling: Minimize passing of birds between people to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus to birds and between humans via birds. This means at most two people (extractor and bander, if different) should touch each bird, in the vast majority of cases. A few cases may arise where a second extractor may have to take over an extraction or the Bander-in-Charge (BIC) take over processing of a bird from the banding assistant.
- Net set up: Setting up of mist nets before opening should be carried out individually by staff and volunteers who have experience doing so. Volunteers who haven't set up nets before can observe from a safe distance. If staff feel comfortable doing so, they can have the volunteer set up a net on their own under supervision. If help is needed from the staff member (i.e., if the net falls on the ground), both individuals must put on masks beforehand.
- Closing nets: With reduced numbers of volunteers, situations may arise where bird volumes are too high to safely process all birds within regular accepted timeframes. If this happens certain nets will be closed to achieve a manageable level of volume.

Visitors

Visitors are still allowed in the park and around the banding station. Metro Vancouver has physical distancing signs in the park and visitors should be told to maintain 2 m distance if they are not doing so. Banding personnel should not be afraid to tell visitors to keep their distance and they are under no obligation to interact with them. Visitors are not allowed in the banding hut.

Monitoring the Plan

Staff will continually assess work sites and activities for COVID-19 risks, and change procedures as needed. Issues and concerns will be shared and discussed among volunteers and staff and volunteers are encouraged to provide input. Should the number of COVID-19 cases continue to increase and the province of BC revert back to a lock down situation, all requirements and recommendations of the Provincial Health Office (PHO) will be monitored and followed. The station personnel are prepared to operate without banding volunteers should the PHO recommendations require it.