

COURSES ON FIELD RESEARCH AND THE 3RS

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In the UK animal research is governed by the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act. This Act requires that a licence needs to be gained if carrying out any procedure that may cause harm or distress to an animal and an accredited training course must be successfully completed before the licence can be granted. These courses give valuable information and direction to new licensees, but the training (until recently) has been aimed at those using laboratory animals specifically bred for this purpose. As a result, much of the material is inappropriate for working with wildlife. To address this gap in training, Central Science Laboratory (York, UK) and the University of York have developed a new course that is specific for researchers working with wild mammals and birds.

The majority of studies involving wildlife are designed to reduce handling to a minimum as this causes stress and can affect the behaviour of the subjects. Hence, for practical and ethical reasons, training in the handling of animals is addressed in this course by the use of video clips but other practical sessions are included, such as the setting of traps, fitting of radio collars and the loading of dart guns. The correct use of such techniques plays a major role in reducing stress during capture or tracking and therefore has a positive impact on animal welfare and quality of science. Another major part of the training course is the ethics and the implementation of the 3Rs associated with wildlife studies, which can be very different to those of laboratory animals.