RPBO Pandemic Protocol  
(Revised July 31, 2020)

The rate of COVID-19 infection on Vancouver Island is very low, and hopefully will remain that way. While it is statistically unlikely that any of our staff and volunteers will be carriers of the virus, we will be adjusting our procedures to comply with the provincial guidelines, acknowledging that they may be revised throughout our banding season. See https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/a6f23959a8b14bfa989e3cda29297ded and select Vancouver Island for current and cumulative information.

#1: It is impossible to spread COVID-19 if you don’t have COVID-19. All staff and volunteers will be expected to follow the provincial guidelines to minimize the risk of contracting COVID-19. This may include limiting time away from home, avoiding large gatherings, proper hand hygiene, wearing masks in public (especially indoors) and appropriate social distancing. **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.**

#2: The second tenet of being able to operate the stations is to minimize the risk of accidentally passing along the virus, particularly from asymptomatic individuals. (Symptomatic individuals should not be present at all.) This may mean that we will go above and beyond the minimum requirements to reduce risk.

#3: We will have a much reduced list of potential volunteers. Willingness to volunteer will be the first cut. Many of our volunteers may choose not to participate this year. Preference will be given to experienced volunteers and those who are willing to commit to a regular schedule. We may decide to limit participation of others based on risk criteria. In any case, any volunteers and staff should be provided with a detailed set of expectations and a waiver form that specifically includes COVID-19.

#4: We will likely not be able to do any extraction or banding training until further notice.

#5: Anything we determine at any point is not set in stone and will need to be adapted as the pandemic situation changes.

**Current Provincial Guidelines:** Social distancing of 2m recommended by provincial health officials, high levels of hand hygiene, wearing of masks when social distancing is not possible.

These guidelines do not depend on a sterile environment, but require additional precautions be taken to reduce the risk of viral transmission.
Under our protocol, banders would be exposed to a potential (but unlikely) risk of contamination due to handling previously handled bags/birds. To minimize the risk, extractors will have wash stations set up in their net zone and are asked to thoroughly clean or sanitize their hands before and after each net round, sanitize at the net if a potential risk event happened (e.g. nose drip), deliver the birds to the holding area, and maintain at least 2m distance from the banding station. Extractors will be encouraged to do observations between rounds.

All volunteers should have a personal bottle of 70% alcohol with them. Small spray bottles are available at the stations.

**Personnel per site:** 2 banders (one of which could replace 1 extractor, serve as scribe/census), 2-3 extractors, 1 scribe, 1 census

- Normally, no ride sharing is permitted for people from different bubbles. Where this is unavoidable, sharing should be limited to the shortest distance necessary, and steps should be taken to minimize risk. (Only two people per car, with the passenger in the back seat, both people wearing masks, windows open, etc.)

- Under normal circumstances, no unescorted visitors will be permitted at the stations (although we hope to be able to have visitors at Pedder Bay once logistics can be worked out.) With permission of the bander, visitors, particularly those participating in the bi-weekly bird walks, may be escorted to the station by RPBO personnel. Names and contact information of all visitors must be recorded in the daily log narrative.

- A transparent divider will be placed between bander and scribe. A maximum of two people should be in the banding station at one time, one on each side of the barrier.

- Masks will be required when in the presence of others where 2m distance can’t be maintained. All volunteers must bring a mask to use when necessary. A supply of masks is available for those who don’t have or didn’t bring their own.

- There will be a reduced number of personnel on site.

- The bander must sanitize the banding gear at beginning and end of banding, and when anyone other than the primary bander takes over. All touch surfaces must be sanitized at the end of each day.

- The computer keyboard, mouse and pad must be sanitized when there is a change of personnel at the computer. This should be done by spraying 70% alcohol on a paper towel or cloth and wiping down the contact surfaces.

- Extractors (could include banders) will be assigned specific nets by the bander-in-charge. The assignments may change throughout the shift. Between rounds, extractors will be encouraged to do observations from the area near their assigned nets.

- Extractor duties can be shared among family/bubble members (i.e. two members of a family could work together for one extractor shift.)
· Clean bags will be placed away from the banding table for pick up by extractors.

· Birds are to be dropped off at least 2 m from the banding table on provided racks. The bander will transfer birds from the rack to the banding table.

· Additional volunteers may be permitted at the stations to serve as observers or runners for the extractors. Observers/runners/census/scribe volunteers may be asked to take injured birds to WildARC.

**Suggested protocols for touch points:**

Station setup (daily): Bander to set up banding gear; scribe to set up computer. All gear to be wiped/sprayed down at beginning and end of the day.

Radios: will be sanitized at the beginning and end of each shift. If volunteers have their own radios, they are encouraged to bring and use them. The radios are set to Channel 2, subchannel 1.

Sightings clipboard: Observers may add their own numbers to the observation sheet after sanitizing their hands.

Difficult extractions: A second extractor or bander may be called to assist with difficult extractions. The original extractor must place the bird back in the net if safe to do so. If not, the extractor should secure the bird and follow the instructions of the bander or second extractor when they arrive. Whenever possible, the extractor should wear masks or turn away when help arrives. The bander/second extractor should wear a mask.