



**THINK SAFE
STAY SAFE**



Tilhill

BSWGROUP member of binderholz

SAFETY AND ASSURANCE BULLETIN

INSIST ON SAFETY

MARCH 2024

Springing Back to Life

The inexorable march of time continues and brings us back round to spring and the time of year where things begin to come back to life. Days becoming longer is a sure indicator of the time of year. Our weather continues to be challenging this winter and may well not be done with us just yet.

As life reemerges from winter we must ensure we are prepared, make the

appropriate plans and take the appropriate actions. The starting point when planning works will be hazards and constraints maps, landowner information, local knowledge and walk throughs when completing an Ecological Site Check Record (SF/146).

We will cover a range of seasonal topics in the following pages.

In this edition

Springing Back to Life

Good Call Award

In the News Elsewhere

Badgers

Badgers are a protected species. Both the animals and their setts are protected by law. It is illegal to carry out any forestry work close to a badger sett without taking steps to positively avoid damage and without an appropriate Licence.

It is a criminal offence to:

- Kill, injure or take a badger.
- Disturb a badger when it is occupying a sett.
- Interfere with a badger sett by damaging or destroying it.
- Obstruct the access to, or any entrance of, a badger sett. It is no excuse in law to be unaware of the presence of badgers.

Look out for:

- Badger Setts – check the shape of the hole. Badger holes tend to be the shape of a capital 'D', with the flat side downwards, and are at least 20-30 cms wide.
- There may be signs of freshly excavated material at the entrance or piles of

leaves, dry grass, straw or bracken, which the badgers take inside to use as bedding. There may be a large spoil heap outside the main sett. This may contain old bedding, bits of fur, and even small bones.

- Clear footprints will show a prominent central pad, and either four or five toes, with good claw marks.
- Badger hair on barbed wire and other wire fences, or under fences.

DO

Undertake reasonable checks for badgers on site. Immediately **STOP** work and inform your manager if you see a badger on your site, discover a badger sett or see other evidence.

DON'T

Use any machinery or fell trees within 20 metres of a sett. Halt operations until advice has been sought.



It is illegal to carry out any forestry work close to a badger sett without an appropriate Licence.

The main points to be taken from this are that signs can often be subtle in the early part of the season prior to hatching and are not confined to the actual nest location.

Know your Nests

Early species breeding efforts are already underway with remaining species on the cusp of getting started. Information gathered from historical breeding attempts, as well as direct observation during pre-operational checks, are our main means of ensuring informed decision making leading to mitigation measures.

It can be difficult to determine both 'ownership' and 'occupancy' of stick nests discovered during checks this early in the season, particularly when thinking of medium-sized nests where there can be a definite overlap in terms of habitat, size and structure. Nests for species such as Common Buzzard, Raven, Goshawk

and Red Kite can all appear similar and may have multiple nests within their nesting territory. Classic signs such as droppings under and around the nest do not accumulate until post hatching, and moulted down and feathers are not always obvious, particularly early in the breeding cycle.

To complicate matters further there are also key species which rely on recycling 'donor' nests from corvids and raptors – Tawny and Long-Eared Owls, Kestrel, Hobby and Merlin are examples of this.

Nests can also sometimes be used by species other than the original occupant. If you have reason to suspect breeding activity in the form of a nest site refer to Tilhill Guidance Note 73 ([GN/73](#)) Finding and Protecting Raptor Nests in Woodland. If you are unsure then get in touch with one of the Ecology Leads within Tilhill, a member of our internal Ecology Team or a local expert(s) such as the local Raptor Study Group. Also remember that any follow up visits to 'Schedule 1' species requires a relevant 'disturbance licence', again your local Raptor Study Group should be able to help.



Merlin chicks in a nest basket

So, what should we be looking for?

- Consider all nest structures as potential breeding sites, even those that may appear initially unlikely. Use the precautionary principle of 'ruling out' sites rather than ruling them in.
- Be attentive to direct observation of relevant bird species in the vicinity or general area of a nest. This does not necessarily mean overt defensive/alarmist behaviours such as calling, mobbing etc., the mere presence of sensitive species at, near, or over such sites should set 'the alarm bells ringing'.
- Presence of stark, white droppings on the forest floor are associated with roosting. This would normally be in general proximity to the nest site rather than around the actual nest itself. Such droppings are typically your earliest signs of habitual use and, by extension, possible breeding.
- Presence and accumulation of pellets (a bolus of undigested fur, bones and feathers regurgitated by the bird) - this can be an important feature particularly when identifying owl sites. Again, this will often be associated with roosting in 'general proximity to' rather than directly related to the nest.
- Plucked prey remains anywhere within the general area, sometimes on a raised 'plucking stool' such as a rock, tree stump or root plate. The size and species of prey will vary so be prepared for everything from the remains of frogs and toads through virtually all small and medium sized birds and mammals including even carrion such as bits of lamb/wool etc. Plucking at this time is often associated with provisioning the incubating female rather than young and large accumulations at single locations are unlikely, so even a single 'kill' could be indicative of breeding activity when other evidence is taken into account.

Ticks

The change of season is a signal that ticks are going to become more active once again on our work sites. Indeed we have already had reports of tick bites this year.

Awareness of ticks and the diseases they can transmit has increased in the recent past with several well-known people making their diagnosis of Lyme Disease publicly known. Last year it was confirmed that Tick Born Encephalitis (TBE) is now present in the tick population in the UK. Unlike Lyme, TBE can be vaccinated against at your local travel clinic. Tilhill employees can take this course and claim the costs back.

The increase in tick numbers and their activity over the past few years means more of us will come across them in our work than before. It is difficult in our daily work to avoid the types of habitats where ticks live and thrive, so we must remain alert to the risk and reduce the likelihood of a bite where we can. You must do a tick check at the end of each day out on site, the graphic below shows you the hot spots for tick bites.

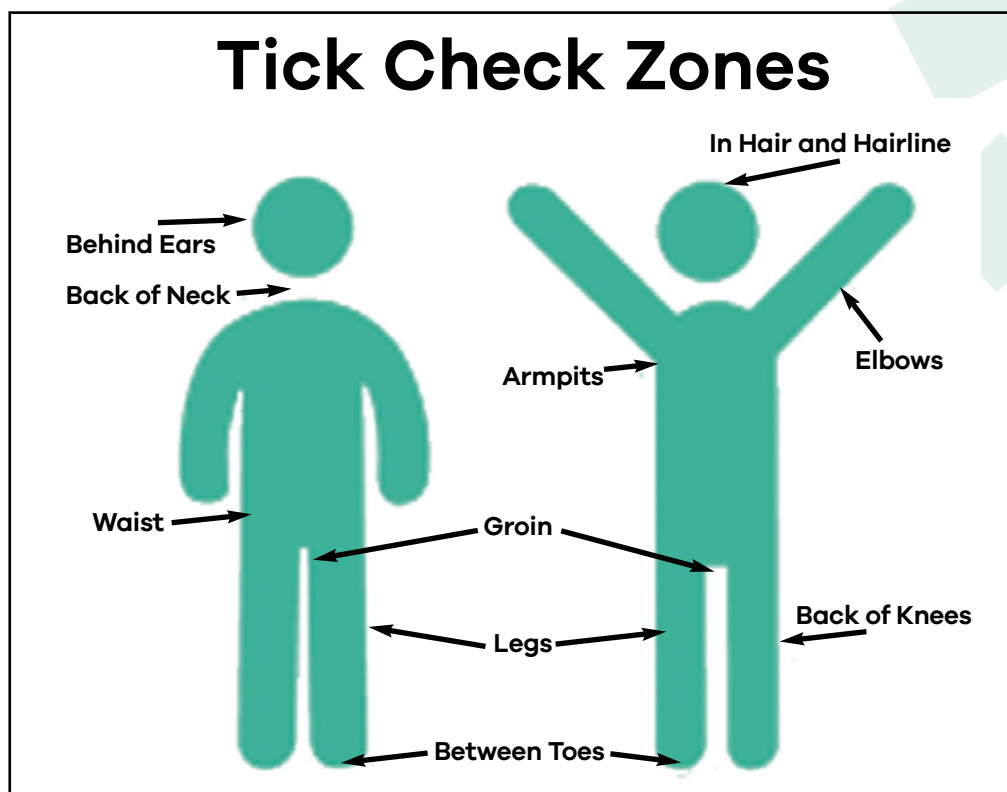
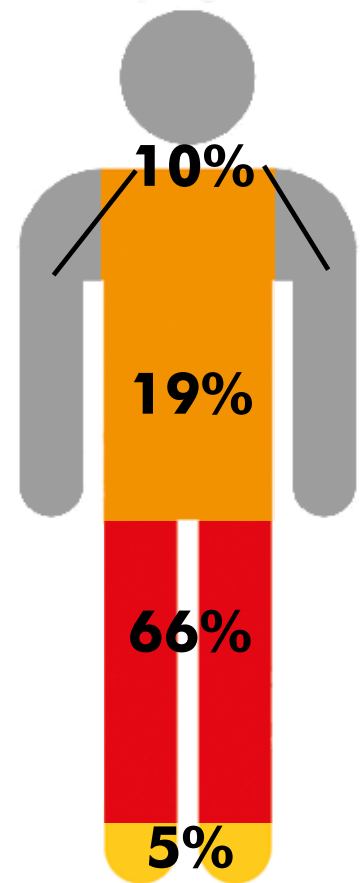
We can reduce the likelihood of a tick bite by following the guidance in Tilhill's Guidance Note 83 ([GN/83](#)). GN83 is a

comprehensive guide and gives more details on steps to take to reduce your risk. Your best defence if you do have a tick bite is to quickly identify any ticks that are attached and safely remove using a proper tick removal tool. GN83 is supported by two further documents, 'Top Tips for Ticks' and a 'Myth Buster' guide. These are both informative and help to explain a little more about ticks, their habits and lives.

The graphic on the right shows the location of reported tick bites through 2023. As in previous years the predominant area for bites is on the leg. Treated clothing is available and has good reported effectiveness. Tilhill staff can source these through the company.

Most common areas on the body to find ticks

- 10% Arms
- 19% Torso
- 66% Legs
- 5% Feet/Ankles



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Planting

The planting season is now well underway, and so it seems the right time to remind ourselves of the importance of ensuring everyone on site has been given an adequate briefing. The briefing must address the site hazards and constraints, planting requirements and specifications and the control measures to minimise Health, Safety and Environmental risk.

At face value planting trees might seem like a simple task, but there are many aspects that require knowledge and experience. Tilhill has a Pre-Planting Briefing sheet that must be gone through with all involved in the planting activity and covers topics such as:

- Point of Work Risk Assessment.
- Pesticides use and pre-treated trees.

- Interpretation and understanding of the planting maps.
- Planting technique and stocking densities.
- Use of machinery and ATVs.
- Correct waste disposal.

When planting treated trees it is essential that contractors have been properly briefed on the required PPE and the correct order to put it on, take off, clean and store it. This is laid out in tool box talk 53 ([TT/53](#)). The appropriate COSHH assessment must also be provided.



Good Call Award

In our January Safety & Assurance Bulletin we announced that we would be running a monthly Good Call Award through 2024. In this month's bulletin we are delighted to announce our winner for January.

Yasmin Ali from our Wales & Marches Region visited an active harvesting site within a managed property and saw conditions giving rise to significant diffuse pollution risk. She stopped work on site and reported the issue to the Forest Works Manager.

By her observation and action Yasmin prevented diffuse pollution, along with the associated environmental and reputational damage. Her actions also prevented potential regulatory involvement for all involved on site.

To be considered for future Good Call Awards you just need to report the issues you find on site and the actions taken to prevent loss or harm. Each month all reports will be judged by a panel to select the winner.



Yasmin receiving her voucher

STOP, THINK and ACT when problems start to develop and before a pollution incident happens.

In the News Elsewhere

A construction company has been prosecuted for health and safety failings after a worker was struck on the head and killed by a 16-tonne excavator.

The deceased was undertaking groundwork activities in a partially excavated trench. The groundworks team was preparing the trench for the laying of new drainage when the deceased moved to the foot of an existing manhole directly adjacent to the trench.

With nothing in place to prevent their entry into the danger zone of the excavator, they exited the manhole via a makeshift opening. However, the excavator driver and other workers were not in a position to see that the deceased had entered the danger zone. When the excavator met resistance whilst digging, the moving bucket swung into them. It struck them on the head, causing catastrophic injuries. They were pronounced dead at the scene.

The construction company had failed to identify or assess the risk arising from using the existing manhole chamber as an improvised refuge. This meant the company failed to implement a system whereby workers were prevented from entering the dangerous working zone of the excavator while the machine was

being operated by a driver with limited sight. There was also inadequate supervision on site, alongside a **failure to carry out monitoring visits** which would have identified crucial safety failings.

Last month, the construction company pleaded guilty to breaching section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act. At Magistrates' Court, the company was fined £330,500 and ordered to pay £9,141.80 in prosecution costs.

Commenting on the case, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector said the incident would have been avoided had the construction company simply ensured that adequate control measures and safe working practices were identified and followed.

'The company should have put in place measures including the use of trained plant marshals for high-risk activities, such as the work the deceased was undertaking. Such measures are widely recognised and used across the construction industry as well as being advised within HSE and industry guidance,' they added.



Image courtesy of the Health and Safety Executive

March 2024 – Safety & Assurance Bulletin briefing

I have been personally briefed in the contents of this Safety & Assurance Bulletin.

Please add any questions relating to this briefing or any other health, safety and environmental matters you wish to raise:

Please add any suggestions on health, safety, sustainability, and/or environmental matters:

I have been briefed by: _____ My Tilhill Office is: _____

I understand that I am encouraged to submit comment and contribution from this bulletin.

Signed: _____	Name: _____	Date: _____
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ORIGINAL sheet to be held at the Tilhill Office.

Send a **COPY** to: Head of Safety, Tilhill, The Gatehouse, Ruck Lane, Horsmonden, Tonbridge, Kent, TN12 8EA. Fax: 01892 860441. Email: ios@tilhill.com

Contractors: If you would like your own copy of this Safety & Assurance Bulletin please contact your local office and ask to be included on the mailing list.