RPBO Pandemic Protocol
(Revised 25 June, 2021)

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: All staff and volunteers will be expected to follow the provincial guidelines to minimize the risk of contracting COVID-19. This may include 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 reduced list of potential volunteers. Willingness to volunteer will be the first cut. Preference will be given to 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 will be required to sign a waiver form that specifically includes COVID-19. We strongly recommend that volunteers who are able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine accept this opportunity.

#4: Banding and extraction training will be limited to volunteers who are willing to commit to at least 10 shifts during migration and owl banding projects in 2021. Trainees (for extraction and banding) are also required to have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19 as training requires working in very close proximity with others.

#5: This protocol will be subject to change at any time, and will be adapted as the pandemic situation changes and public health guidelines are updated.

Provincial/Federal Health Guidelines: With rapidly changing guidelines, rather than listing and updating them frequently, we will simply state that, at a minimum, we will comply with the current BC Covid Guidelines, or if they are stricter, the Federal Guidelines as we conduct work on federal lands. We acknowledge that we are also working on private lands, but the protocol we set will be in effect at all RPBO worksites.

In addition to the requirements under Public Health Guidelines, we will also require all personnel to respect the personal boundaries of other volunteers and staff. Individuals may have reasons for following stronger precautions than the general guidelines and any requests for additional distance, sanitation, or hygiene (including mask wearing when nearby) should be honoured.

The guidelines do not depend on a sterile environment, but require additional precautions be taken to reduce the risk of viral transmission.

Banders could be exposed to a potential (but unlikely) risk of contamination due to handling previously handled bags/birds. To minimize the risk, wash stations will be set up and extractors 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 away from the station between rounds.

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

- **The details surrounding station visits are likely to change throughout the season. Names and contact information of all visitors must be recorded in the daily log narrative.**
- A moveable 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. If both parties are fully vaccinated (or are members of the same household) and would like to open the barrier, this would be permitted if compliant with the Public Health Guidelines.
- Masks may 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.
- 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.
- 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, following any procedures they have in place.

**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. The use of masks should follow Provincial/Federal Guidelines (at a minimum).