

Forest Protection Survey Program

Survey Guideline - Opportunistic Observations
(V5.0)



Acknowledgements

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Opportunistic Observations

Context

Opportunistic observations are observations of a species, ecosystem or habitat that is not the specific target of the survey technique being implemented. Opportunistic observations include incidental records of non-target species observed while conducting a specified survey technique, or may simply be an opportunistic observation while travelling to or from a survey, walking into a site, etc.

Observations on, or in the vicinity of, sites are of particular interest.

It is not intended that surveyors will record all observations of all species as this is not possible.

Objectives

To make incidental observations of species, ecosystems or habitats on an opportunistic basis, particularly on and in close vicinity to sites visited.

To take advantage of the presence of field teams in regional areas to increase our knowledge of the distribution of rare and threatened species.

To record opportunistic observations of threatened species in a timely but accurate manner.

Survey effort

The triggers for recording an opportunistic observation, in order of priority, are:

- A species, ecosystem or habitat that are the target of a survey program, but not the target of the survey technique being implemented e.g. spotlight a sooty owl after conducting a LBP thermal imaging survey. This includes records of species for which detection of an individual/population or nest site, etc., may require future protection or where future targeted surveys are planned.
- A species, ecosystem or habitat that are not the target of the survey but that are considered rare, threatened or to be an otherwise unusual observation e.g. observing an unusual orchid or hearing a rare non-target frog species before or after conducting a targeted frog survey.
- A species that is identified before or after a standard survey technique, is an incidental record e.g. spotlighting a brushtail possum after a spotlight transect is complete.

Field observers shall always be vigilant for potential, unsolicited observations of rare and threatened species during their field activities.

Observers shall not interrupt their field schedules, nor take time, beyond about 5-10 minutes, out of targeted surveys, to make opportunistic observations.

In most cases field observers shall only spend a matter of minutes on confirming and recording opportunistic observations.

For initially fleeting observations, observers shall aim to spend little time (minutes) attempting confirmation, exercising their best judgement based on the conservation status of the species, the time available, and the likelihood of it being detected again then and there or by future planned targeted surveys.

If an opportunistic observation is made, then observers shall take enough time to record the required details in the OppObs datasheet/form.

Where possible, surveyors are required to submit at least one georeferenced photo of each opportunistic observation.

Surveyor requirements

Observers may be required during audit, to demonstrate that they have the relevant expertise in identifying the observed e.g. the threatened species and its ecology and habitat.

Observers are required to be aware of all the species, ecosystems and habitats of the threatened and non-threatened fauna that may be within an area, not just the ones that they are specifically targeting in surveys.

Equipment for the technique

- Digital or other Camera (with carry case, spare batteries, spare storage card) capable of including georeferencing data with each photo.
- Field datasheets/forms or electronic recording device
- Site maps and aerial photos, and a search plan for the site
- Range finder
- Binoculars
- Hand-held compass or similar
- GPS unit
- Plastic zip-lock bags of various sizes
- Waterproof labels

Conducting the survey

This survey technique is opportunistic and may be conducted at any time while engaged in the Forest Protection Survey Program.

No specific effort is required for this survey technique.

Applies when observers are conducting any of the other survey techniques.

Data reporting requirements

Data requirements are outlined throughout this guideline and in the datasheet/forms. Complete all required fields on the datasheet/forms for each target observation.

- Record in the comments field, any further site identifying information that may assist in relocating the observation in the future.
- Trees with a DBHOB > 2.5 m are protected and must be recorded as per instructions for recording large trees detailed in the CHASS or Flora Survey Guidelines.
- Record and map specified vegetation communities and habitats. If recording vegetation communities, populations of target plant species or target habitats, please follow the data recording requirements outlined in the CHASS survey guideline. This includes recording a polygon and submitting the polygon of the area of interest and submitting this data as a Polygon shape file.
- Record and submit georeferenced photos.
- Record your observations in the ObsAttributes page, with each observation being entered on a separate row.
- For the ObsAttributes page, if recording “sign” of an animal or habitat, record the “sign” in the Common Name field, and the animal it may apply to in the comments column.
- A comprehensive list explaining the data entry fields and whether they are mandatory or optional can be found in the DataFieldsExplained page.
- Spelling of a name in the CommonNameField must match spelling in the lookup table otherwise the TaxonID column will not be automatically populated.
- **Please Note: Surveyors are expected to submit highest quality data. Please ensure you double check your data entry before submitting data. Submitting incorrect or incomplete information will result in a delay to reporting and may impact on the program outcomes.**

Appendix. Some examples of Fish/Crayfish Opportunistic Observations

Images by Tarmo A. Raadik, DEECA, Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

1. Dead freshwater mussel shells along stream banks

– keep small and large shells for identification (in Ziplock bag with label)



1. Crayfish exoskeletons (full or partial) along stream banks, within riparian zone or upslope

- place whole exoskeleton into Ziplock bag with label, be sure to locate and keep claws



- take digital images of live specimens (top and sides), record lat/long, date and time

- place dead shells in Ziplock bag with label, record lat/long, time and date



4. Soil chimneys, as evidence of **Burrowing crayfish** presence and activity

– take images and record the location, and date

