



## **Wash Wader Research Group**

### **Bullying & harassment policy**

#### **Summary**

The Wash Wader Research Group is committed to the fundamental principle that all members, inclusive of all officers, fieldwork trip leaders, volunteers and any staff employed by the group, regardless of their position, are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect and not subject to bullying or harassment when carrying out their duties on behalf of the charity by everyone else.

It is recognised that harassment and bullying can cause personal distress and negatively impact on families, individual work groups and the group as a whole, leading to stress, illness and also putting at risk the lives of the birds that we catch if relationships break down at a critical stage. This policy provides guidance on behaviour, a complaints procedure and support mechanisms to enable all that take part in the WWRG activities to be part of and contribute to a fair and inclusive volunteering environment.

The WWRG takes all claims of discrimination, harassment or victimisation seriously and will take appropriate and timely action against those concerned. Actions which breach the principles of this policy will be investigated and may result in termination of group membership.

#### **1. Introduction**

To support this policy statement, the group is committed to taking all practical steps to ensure that volunteers can work in an environment that is free from unfair discrimination, and inappropriate or oppressive behaviour.

##### **1.1 Scope of the policy**

The WWRG bullying and harassment policy covers everyone who is a member of the group or is participating on a WWRG field trip. It covers WWRG officers, team leaders, general membership, visiting ringers and everyone who is involved with any aspects of the group activities and development, whether it be during or outside of the more formal catching sessions. It will be applied equally, irrelevant to the level of group participation.

##### **1.2 Roles and responsibilities**

Everyone has the responsibility to recognise bullying and harassment when it happens and to take steps to eliminate it. All officers, trip leads, and volunteers must ensure that their behaviour is appropriate to

the environment we operate in, and does not contribute to an environment in which bullying and harassment is either condoned or encouraged.

Individuals subjected to offensive behaviour should challenge it or bring it to the attention of a trip leader or trustee as soon as is practically and safely possible.

Those who witness it should offer support to the individual concerned and seek their permission to report it.

### **1.3 The impact of bullying and harassment**

Bullying and harassment can have a devastating effect on individuals and their families, for example resulting in:

- feelings of fear, humiliation, anger, frustration and loss of control
- stress, anxiety and depression
- ill health
- absences from WWRG fieldwork and events
- low morale, low motivation
- poor quality work and/or mistakes
- difficulty in effectively engaging with the team
- leaving the group

It is in everybody's interest to address bullying and harassment and promote a safe, healthy and fair environment in which people can volunteer and enjoy their relaxation time.

## **2. Harassment**

### **2.1 Defining harassment**

The legal and accepted definition of harassment is *"unwanted conduct that intentionally or unintentionally violates a person's dignity, or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them"*.

Each person has the right to decide what behaviour is either acceptable or unacceptable to them. If an individual finds certain behaviour unacceptable and they feel damaged by it, then that individual has every right to say so, and their right to do so will be respected. This does not necessarily mean that harassment has occurred.

Where it cannot be established that there was an intention to offend, conduct will be regarded as harassment, if taking all the circumstances into account, particularly including the recipient's views, it would be reasonable to come to that conclusion.

People can be subjected to harassment on a wide variety of grounds. These can include:

- sex
- sexual orientation
- transgender
- marital status
- race, nationality, ethnic origin, national origin or skin colour
- neurodiversity

- disability
- age
- the carrying out of health and safety duties
- religious or political beliefs
- deeply held personal beliefs
- criminal record
- health, e.g. AIDS/HIV sufferers, etc.
- physical characteristics and ability
- willingness to challenge harassment - being ridiculed or victimised for raising a complaint

Harassment is normally characterised by more than one incident of unacceptable behaviour, particularly if it recurs once it has been made clear that it is regarded by the victim as offensive. However, just one incident may constitute harassment if it is sufficiently serious. As harassment can occur on a variety of grounds, anyone perceived to be different is at risk.

Harassment on any grounds, including the above, will not be tolerated.

## **2.2 Examples of harassment**

Harassment takes many forms: from relatively mild banter to actual physical violence. This can take place either in a direct physical form (e.g. on a fieldwork trip), through social media or other forms of written communication.

Individuals may not always realise that their behaviour constitutes harassment, but they must recognise that what is acceptable to one person may not be acceptable to another - determining what is acceptable is an individual right that we must all respect.

Verbal harassment: examples include (but are not restricted to): verbal harassment, open hostility, offensive jokes, suggestive remarks, innuendoes, rude or vulgar comments, malicious gossip and offensive songs.

Non-verbal harassment: examples include wolf-whistles, obscene gestures and/or facial expressions/body language designed to demean, sexually suggestive, offensive posters/calendars, pornographic material (both paper-based and generated on a computer, including offensive screensavers), graffiti, offensive letters, offensive and suggestive emails written to apply pressure to get what an individual wants, text messages or video material on mobile phones and offensive objects.

Physical harassment: examples include standing too close to someone, unnecessary touching, patting, pinching or brushing against another employee's body, intimidating behaviour, assault and physical coercion.

Coercion: examples include pressure for sexual favours and pressure to participate in group activities.

Isolation or non-cooperation: examples include failure to provide requested information, exclusion from activities, e.g. meetings, and from social activities involving the group.

Intrusion: examples include stalking, pestering, spying, etc.

## **3. Bullying**

### **3.1 Defining bullying**

Unlike harassment there is no one common definition of exactly what bullying means. Research has revealed that bullying is a sustained form of psychological abuse, where the bully embarks on a course of aggressive and abusive behaviour with the aim of gradually wearing the victim/organisation down so that they feel demeaned, inadequate and must comply with the views of the aggressor. This can be between individuals or groups.

A useful definition could therefore be as follows: *“offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or an abuse or misuse of power, which has the purpose, or effect of intimidating, belittling and humiliating the recipients, leading to loss of self-esteem for the victim and ultimately the self-questioning of their worth, both in the group and more widely in society”*.

### **3.2 Examples of bullying**

Bullying can range from extreme forms such as violence and intimidation to less obvious actions like deliberately ignoring someone. These can be split into two categories and examples can include:

Obvious bullying:

- shouting or swearing at people in public and private
- persistent criticism
- persecution through threats and instilling fear
- spreading malicious rumours
- constantly undervaluing effort
- spontaneous rages, often over trivial matters

Less obvious bullying:

- withholding information or supplying incorrect information
- ignoring or deliberately excluding people

These examples listed are not exhaustive. The actions listed must be viewed in terms of the distress they cause the individual or group. As with harassment, it is the perceptions of the recipient that determines whether any action or statement can be viewed as bullying.

## **4. What is not harassment and bullying?**

The officers and team leaders of WWRG have a need to make decisions and issue direct requests for members to deliver specific action in a specific way to protect the safety of the team and the birds. To effect the safety of the team and the birds, officers and team leads are to make decisions and issue instructions, provide volunteers with accurate information which may be critical, or to take steps to improve performance when required to improve safety of the team participants and the birds.

Trip and catch leaders are responsible for the safety and welfare of the birds, the team and the public. The legitimate exercise of managerial responsibility to maintain all aspects of the safe and compliant running of the WWRG is not bullying and harassment and, at times, may require a firm but fair management style.

Personality clashes are not bullying and harassment, unless they result in behaviour which meets the above definitions. There may sometimes be a fine line between behaviour which is bullying and harassment, and behaviour which is not acceptable for other reasons, e.g. inappropriate management style due to lack of experience or training. It will be important to investigate the reasons for behaviour to ensure that it is dealt with effectively and those affected by it are given appropriate support.

The policy is not intended to deal with occasional minor lapses of good manners, courtesy or respect. It is recognised that the behaviour of individuals in the workplace can vary from day to day. Someone who is normally civil may occasionally appear impatient or discourteous. This may be for a variety of reasons including work pressure, domestic difficulties or ill health and should be dealt with sensitively, initially by monitoring the situation and offering assistance as appropriate.

## **5. Malicious or false complaints**

If it is considered that an individual has knowingly made a false or malicious complaint of bullying or harassment, this will be treated seriously and may lead to formal action against the complainant and any others who have provided false information, and could lead to removal from the group.

A complaint will be deemed to be malicious when an investigation identifies that it has intentionally been made to deliberately cause distress and/or to discredit the person or group against whom the allegation has been made.

## **6. Expectation of behaviour**

### **6.1 Definition of terms**

#### 6.1.1 Officers and team leaders

Officers and team leads are defined as the charity trustees and any individual person who has a defined responsibility for the effective and safe running of the WWRG as a charity. This includes all members involved with the Operations, Communication, House and Scientific Committees, all aspects of managing the trips and managing of scientific data.

#### 6.1.2 Members, volunteers and visitors

Members and volunteers are defined as any individual working on behalf of the charity with the knowledge of the officers or team leaders. Visitors include individuals who attend WWRG activities, e.g. visiting research workers, film crews etc who are working alongside the charity to deliver its charitable aims.

### **6.2 Behavioural expectations**

#### 6.2.1 Officers and field trip leads

WWRG expects that all officers will act in a way that puts the group, its members and the birds ahead of personal opinion and ambition.

Decisions that are made will be in the best nature of the group, its members and the birds. This will be applied throughout all aspects of the group's activities, from team selection through to on-the-ground group activities such as allocating jobs to individuals, who rings unusual birds, or who does the shopping.

These decisions, where appropriate, will be made in consultation, but when there are issues of a sensitive and personal nature these decisions will be handled with discretion and privacy. To avoid any possible issues inadvertently happening, it is expected that attendees on trips will declare any medical, or other relevant, conditions before the trip so that trip leads are aware and do not put people in potentially harmful or embarrassing situations (e.g. being tasked with inappropriate requests such as being asked to carry heavy items of fieldwork kit, walk across mudflats etc).

#### 6.2.2 Members

As a member of the WWRG, it is expected that members will respect the views and decisions made by the group's officers and field trip leads at all times. Members are expected to be courteous and act responsibly to each other, the officers and also to the members of the public that they engage with.

#### 6.2.3 Social media

At no time will anyone engaged with the WWRG under any circumstance use social media to bring the group into disrepute. In the event of this happening the action will be considered as either bullying or harassment and may well mean the individual having their membership withdrawn.

### **7. Handling of complaints and review of decisions.**

Any grievance raised by either an officer, field trip leader, member or participant will be handled discretely and in confidence.

On fieldwork trips, any complaints should be raised with the trip leader or safeguarding lead as soon as is practical and safe to do so and, where appropriate to do so, dealt with on the trip. The trip lead will be clearly identified at the beginning of the trip. Alternatively, complaints can be raised with any trustee or safeguarding officer and a conversation will be had to determine the way forward.

Where more formal investigation is required, a small group of appropriate members, made up of a range of individuals across the group, including at least one trustee who will lead the process, will be set up to review the complaint and provide recommendations. It may be necessary to hold conversations with individuals involved with the specific situation that is being investigated. The final recommendation will sit with the Chair of the group's trustees, if no agreed way forward can be found.

**First published: 23 January 2026**

**Adopted by trustees: 19 January 2026**

**Date reviewed:**