Animal Eye Consultants of Iowa

Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee

Policy #40	Field Studies
Approval Date: 11/18/2024 (Last reviewed 7/11/2022)	

A. Purpose

This policy describes the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) review process for research and teaching activities involving non-domesticated, vertebrate animals and cephalopods in their natural habitat, hereinafter referred to as "field studies?, conducted under the auspices of Animal Eye Consultants of Iowa (AEC).

B. Background

AEC is dedicated to maintaining the highest standards for animal care and use in research and teaching activities including those involving free-ranging wildlife, while ensuring compliance with all applicable laws, policies, and regulations.
Field studies have a unique set of requirements to be considered compared to research conducted in a laboratory or captive setting. This includes securing local, state, and federal collecting permits, as appropriate; considering zoonoses and other hazards associated with wildlife, as well as challenges of working in a field setting. Intramurally, **field studies must obtain either IACUC approval or an exemption**.

C. Policy

1. Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator

i. Permits

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for acquiring and maintaining all necessary permits, including federal, state, and local approvals before the field study can start.

ii. Field Safety:

The PI should be knowledgeable about and train research personnel to be prepared for relevant zoonotic diseases and associated safety issues with the target species and potential non-target species that may be encountered, and with the unique risks of the field study (e.g. extreme weather, altitude, wildlife,

emergencies in remote areas, threatening behavior or harassment from strangers, etc.). It is recommended that PIs conduct a risk assessment in advance of the field activity and develop a field safety plan (communication/check-in plan, emergency contacts, basic first aid, etc.). See the AEC Field Safety Manual for additional resources. AEC also has an online Field Research Safety training available for AEC personnel. The AEC Environmental Health and Safety Office is available to assist in performing risk assessments and the development of a field safety plan (https://ehs.animal-eye-iowa.com/contact-information/).

Field studies that involve work with species that pose a high risk of infectious pathogens (e.g., rabies risk with bats, racoons and skunks, hantaviruses with wild rodents) will also be reviewed by the AEC Office (ORA)
Research Safety Team. This is to help ensure we have the proper safety procedures in place and, when necessary, proper vaccinations are offered to research personnel.

iii. Submission of Materials for IACUC/AWP Review

Prior to conducting any field studies, the PI must first receive either IACUC approval for an Animal Subjects Approval Form (ASAF) or an exemption letter from the Animal Welfare Program (AWP) Office. In either case, the first step is for the PI to submit an abstract of the proposed field study to the Animal Welfare Program (AWP) at IACUC@animal-eye-iowa.com . The AWP will then assess and determine, in consultation with a member of the campus veterinary staff, IACUC Chair, or other IACUC members as needed, whether the study requires IACUC review or if it can be exempt, as defined by current policy. If the field study meets criteria for exemption from IACUC review, then an exemption letter will be issued. This document can be used as needed for publication or dissertation purposes. If the study does not meet these criteria, the PI must submit an ASAF in the MyResearch database and receive its approval before the field study can start.

a. *Exempt Activities not requiring IACUC Review and Approval*
Purely observational studies, in which animals are not manipulated for research purposes and their environment is not intentionally affected in a way that could alter the animal's behavior, are typically exempt from IACUC review.

Examples of Exempt Activities:

- Placement of camera traps **without** baits to assess species occurrence.
- Opportunistic noninvasive sample collection without animal contact or baiting (e.g., hair or fecal sample collection from the environment).

An ASAF will need to be submitted if the scope of work changes and requires manipulation of animals or their environment prior to initiating the change.

b. *Non-Exempt Activities requiring IACUC Review and Approval*
Activities that involve manipulation of the animal or intentionally manipulating their environment will require IACUC approval.

Examples of Non-Exempt Activities:

- Capturing animals by any means (trapping, darting, mist netting, etc.) for research- or teaching-related purposes.
- Baiting an area to monitor wildlife reaction.
- Modification of a species' habitat, nest, or burrow.
- IACUC approval is required by the funding agency.

2. USDA Oversight of Field Research:

The USDA Animal Welfare Act and Regulation (AWA/R) do not pertain to most field studies. However, field studies within the United States that involve USDA covered species (wild mammals and birds), include invasive procedures (e.g., major operative procedures), harm, or materially alter the behavior of an animal under the study (i.e., cause distress, disrupt the animal's ability to express species-specific behaviors and responses, or negatively impact chances of survival or reproduction) are subject to the requirements in the AWA/R, in addition to the requirements listed above in this policy. USDA covered studies will require additional detail in the ASAF, review during routine USDA inspections, and a requirement to include the number of animals used in our annual report. The IACUC will make this determination during review and USDA protocols will be properly documented in the MyResearch online system.

D. Resources

1. National Research Council, 2011. Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. 8th Edition. The National Academies Press, Washington, DC.
2. 2016 Guidelines of the American Society of Mammalogists for the use of wild mammals in research and education (ndsu.edu)
3. The Ornithological Council, 2023. Guidelines to The Use of Wild Birds in Research. 4th Edition. The Ornithological Council, Washington, DC.
4. Guidelines for Use of Live Amphibians and Reptiles in Field and Laboratory Research
5. UCB Safety Guidelines for Field Researchers
6. UCSB Field Research Safety
7. Sikes, R.S., Romero, L.M. What Constitutes Material Alteration of Behavior? *Lab Anim* **51**, 181 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41684-022-01004-0