

Wildlife Management and Licensing



Guidance on references for applicants and referees: Science and Conservation Licensing

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/wildlife-management-licensing/forms.htm>

References often do not provide the **specific** information we need, and this can cause delays for you and additional work for Licensing Officers in seeking clarification. The purpose of this note is to provide clarity for applicants and their referees on the requirements for references in support of licence applications for science and conservation activities.

Why does Natural England need references?

A licence does not constitute a qualification or accreditation and should not be used as one. It recognises the licensee has been considered by Natural England as having the appropriate skills to carry out the activity permitted by the particular licence. Natural England is committed to ensuring that licences for Science, Conservation and Research activities are only issued to people who have the experience and skill to exercise the licence properly. Natural England does check compliance with its licences. However, they are often exercised with minimal supervision, and some techniques have potential to cause harm if used incorrectly. Furthermore, a lack of skill or experience could affect the quality of work carried out e.g. production of poor quality survey data or unsuccessful conservation activities. Whilst the applicant's own statements explaining their previous work are important, the assessment of written references plays an important role in helping Natural England determine an applicant's suitability to hold a licence.

When are references required?

We ask for written references (original documents) in support of licence applications in the following circumstances:

- you have not held a licence for the species (or similar species¹) in question in the **last 3 years** - two references required.
- you are an **existing licence holder** wishing to **add new methods** (not previously endorsed by referees) to your licence - one reference required.
- In some cases, we will consider a **certificate from a training course instead of one** of the references. The certificate must show that you have successfully completed, and not just attended, the course. The content of the course should cover the activities and methods you now wish to be licensed to undertake. Training courses are provided by several organisations, for example Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM), Field Studies Council (FSC), The Herpetological Conservation Trust (HCT), the Wildlife Trusts (WTs), The Mammal Society, Bat Conservation Trust (BCT).

In some circumstances, we will consider an application with only one reference if you have a similar licence (i.e. for similar species and methods) from another authority e.g. Countryside

¹ Examples of similar species are 'smooth newt and great crested newt'.

Council for Wales or Scottish Natural Heritage. In these circumstances, please submit a copy of that licence with your application.

Who should write my reference?

A reference should be written by someone who has ‘first-hand’ knowledge of your work on the species named on the application (or a similar species, e.g. other bat species), and who is confident on the basis of that knowledge to provide comments on your suitability to undertake the proposed work². The referee should have held a similar licence in the last 3 years (i.e. for the species and methods for which the application is being made). See exceptions.

We will not usually accept a reference from your relatives or partners, and generally, we will not accept both references from referees employed at the same company as you.

Exceptions

- Natural England is prepared to be flexible when requesting references for applications to work on **rare/less studied species** e.g. marine species, invertebrates or molluscs, where very few other people may be carrying out similar licensed work or where there tends to be only one or two national specialists (who may be unlicensed). In these circumstances, you may experience difficulty identifying two separate referees so we exercise some discretion when considering reference requirements. Please [contact us](#) for advice if you have difficulty securing references for work on uncommonly licensed species.
- Bat licence applications for Natural England volunteers are often endorsed by a licensed trainer. Trainers work in a voluntary capacity to train volunteer bat workers to carry out roost visits for Natural England. However, if you require a licence to undertake surveys but do not wish to work as a volunteer, two references will be required.

What does a reference need to say?

To help referees provide the information we need in a clear format, we are introducing a [reference template](#). We hope this will save time for both us and the referee. The template will be available on our website and can be completed electronically (and submitted by email with your application to wildlife@naturalengland.org.uk).

The reference should be a concise statement, **relevant** to the licence application, containing sufficient information to help us judge both your skill and ability **and** that of the referee. It should consist of two main elements:

- a statement of the **referee’s own experience** with the relevant species and activities/methods, providing licence numbers.
- a statement on **their knowledge of your experience and competence** in working with the relevant species using the techniques/methods applied for in the licence application. The statement should state how long they have known/worked with you, providing specific examples of licences (including licence reference numbers) under which you have acted as an agent or assistant. It may also list training courses successfully completed, where these are **relevant** to the application. Where the application relates to a specific time-limited project, the referee should comment on the scope (and scale) of the project and your ability to complete it successfully.

² Referees should not feel pressured into providing a reference for an applicant whom they feel does not have the necessary experience or skills.

It is crucial that the referee makes **specific** reference to your experience with the species and techniques for which the licence is sought: for example, where you seek a licence to use bottle trapping for Great Crested Newts, it is not adequate for the referee to simply mention 'surveys' of great crested newts.

How Natural England considers references

We do exercise some discretion in considering references. Our requirements and the level of scrutiny becomes much higher as the risks increase e.g. where the techniques have a greater potential to cause harm to the species or where the species is particularly rare.

For example, we require evidence of field experience of handling dormouse as well as attendance at a training course because this species requires particular expertise to handle properly. In contrast, to obtain a licence for barn owl surveys in buildings, references need to confirm that the applicant has some knowledge of barn owl ecology and will carry out activities in a conscientious manner, avoiding unnecessary disturbance.

In considering references, we may contact you or your referees to verify the reference or to request further information that will help us make the licensing decision.

END

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