What wildlife and fieldwork research requires AEC approval?

Please note: the need to obtain AEC approval for La Trobe University wildlife projects is different to the need to obtain government/state issued permits (i.e., Wildlife Research Permits [DEECA] or Parks Victoria permits). AEC approval is usually required before government / state issue permits.

- For AEC approval, the requirements of the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes apply.
- For government issued permits, State legislation and requirements apply.
- For some research / teaching you will need AEC approval and government/state issued permits
- For some research / teaching you will need AEC approval but not government/state issued permits.

PROJECTS THAT FOCUS ON LIVE ANIMAL RESEARCH AND/OR TEACHING THAT REQUIRE AEC APPROVAL

- Projects in which wildlife are captured, handled, or housed in LTU facilities
- Projects in which wildlife are captured, handled, or housed in the field that include
    - Simple trap and release projects with no measuring or biometric data collection
    - Wet pit-falls that may catch vertebrates as by-catch
    - Tracking of wildlife using attached devices that may or may not involve capture and/or handling

- Projects involving techniques with the potential to cause behavioural changes or potential for interference including but not limited to:
    - Observation using spotlighting or close approach.
    - Observation using drones (except where published evidence establishes a safe distance that would not cause potential interference) – please seek advice from EIB
    - Baited camera 'traps'
    - Use of active acoustic monitoring equipment with call playback (i.e. AnaBat ™, Song Meter ™, AudioMoths™)
    - Active shelter inspections e.g. rock/log turning, tile survey, investigating a nest/roost box and disturbing nest sites.

- Projects in which wildlife are collected
    - Collection of live voucher specimens (noting s3.3.42 of the Code)
    - Studies involving live vertebrate pest animals (noting s3.3.43-44 of the Code)

AEC approval is not required for

- Observational projects involving no interference i.e., non-invasive behavioural studies of animals including but not limited to
    - Observation using telescopes, binoculars, and cameras at distance
    - Observation using drones where published evidence establishes a safe distance that would not cause potential interference. Seek EIB guidance
    - Use of passive acoustic monitoring equipment without call playback
    - Use of unbaited camera traps
    - Roost exit survey for bats

- Research and/or teaching projects that do not intentionally involve living animals. Examples include
    - botanists using cages/bags/netting/fencing around plants and/or plant products such as flowers or seeds
- The collection of biological material including faeces (scat), food residues, hair, fur, feathers from the ground where there is unlikely to be wildlife disturbance in the collection of such material
- Observation of unused burrows, nests, and animal tracks where there is unlikely to be wildlife disturbance in such observations
- Opportunistic sourcing of partial or whole (dead) animals if an investigator is not involved or responsible for the death of any of the animals, and that the killing was not on behalf of the investigator. For example, sourcing of fish from commercial fish mongers, animal tissue from abattoirs.
- Acquiring tissues of animals that died naturally or were euthanised on veterinary advice.

Guidance related to completing an application for AEC consideration

1. **Technical notes**

Use of honey in baits – Honey (creamed or not) must not be used in baits. The exposure of honey and allowing access to honey by bees is an offence under the *Livestock Disease Control Act 1994*. This restriction is due to the risk of spreading diseases found in honey, to other bees that consume the honey and take it back to the hive.

- The Wildlife and Small Institutions Animal Ethics Committee (WSIAEC) established by Agriculture Victoria recommends the use of golden syrup.

Call playback – must be restricted to two 1-minute periods per species. It must not be carried out during the breeding season of the target species. Justification must be provided, specific to the species and supported by scientific evidence for exceptions.

Log/rock rolling – must be restricted to 10-15% of the available habitat within the study area. Justification must be provided, specific to the species and supported by scientific evidence, for exceptions.

Voucher specimens and DNA samples – must be deposited with the Australian Museum. Only appropriately licensed investigators may take voucher specimens.

Tile surveys – must include a tile removal strategy. Removal must be staged. E.g. Where <10% of tiles are found to provide habitat for vertebrate fauna, all tiles can be removed concurrently. Where >10% of tiles are found to provide habitat for vertebrate fauna, tile removal will be staged.

Use of drones – must be described in the project application with a statement that the operator is suitably qualified and competent. A co-investigator declaration form is not required for the operator if

they are only operating the UAV. In Victoria investigators will need a permit: https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/get-into-nature/events-and-filming-permits/rpa-and-drone-filming-and-photography-guidelines

2. Completing the application form

Form section	Guidance
1.1 Project category	Wildlife studies would be Teaching and or Research noting one or more categories can be selected
1.2 Permits	List permits you expect to apply for, following AEC approval
1.4 Collaboration	The AEC must be informed of other institutions that may be involved in the research or teaching you undertake e.g., other universities, marine stations - LTU may need to establish collaborative agreements in these circumstances. Also If another ethics committee reviews a project and you are named as a collaborator then you do not need to have an additional LTU AEC approval- however (s2.6.8) you must notify the AEC in writing.
1.5 Privately owned animals	This may apply if using animals belonging to zoos, wildlife parks or other captive collections that may or may not have their own Animal Ethics Committee. If another ethics committee reviews a project and you are named as a collaborator then you do not need to have an additional LTU AEC approval- however (s2.6.8) you must notify the AEC in writing.
1.7 Animals to be used	Often in wildlife studies it is difficult to estimate total numbers that will be part of research or teaching. However, the AEC needs to know an estimate of total numbers. For observational studies, it is acceptable to add 'all observed during the study period' for survey **or** provide a realistic maximal number expected. **Note** Studies in which no procedures (including catching) are performed on wildlife do not get reported to Animal Welfare Victoria.
1.7 Phenotype reports	These are not usually relevant to wildlife projects.
1.9 Repeated use of animals	For wildlife studies answer Yes (and explain) if animals may have been captured before, to the best of your knowledge. The same individual animal being used in multiple procedures or activities is considered recurrent use (re-use). If this is unavoidable, specific justification must be made and approved by LTU AEC. It is expected, where possible that a lifetime record, of all activities an individual animal has been subjected to, be maintained. As examples: • Two consecutive nights at any one survey site is defined as recurrent use as there is the potential to catch the same individual twice. • All methods that have the potential to alter animal behaviour e.g. baited cameras, call playback, rock rolling etc have the potential for recurrent use.
2.3 Potential benefits (select most relevant)	Often wildlife research is performed with environmental objectives as well as understanding animal biology. However, you only need to select the most relevant option.

Form section	Guidance
2.6 Refinement	Include any direct or indirect impact on: • Target and non-target species e.g., by-catch. • Dependent young. Some examples: • Avoid close-range observation wherever possible during breeding and feeding. • Make sure not to disturb nest sites. · • Take care when walking and when pushing through dense shrubs as some birds nest on the ground or in vegetation very close to the ground. • Consider endangered species that may be in the areas. Consider this also at s4.2.11
3.1 General methodology	Also include the location(s) of the study, a timeline of activities and a description of any handling of or disturbance to the animals. You may want to include a transect map or map of locations
4.2 Experimental procedures	For wildlife research where there is capture, add that animals will be monitored after release to ensure no injuries etc and how that will be recorded. For wildlife research grey out procedures not relevant to your project e.g., 4.2.2/3/4/8 Note • Wet pitfall trapping is of particular concern • Observational studies only need consideration under s4.2.11. As per The Code section 3.3.33, the wellbeing of wildlife must be supported by: • Using appropriate methods, techniques and equipment. • Minimising the risk of transmission of disease, and direct and indirect disturbance to the habitat. • Avoiding or minimising harm, including pain and distress: • To target and non-target species. • To dependent young. • From indirect effects arising from impact on the habitat and environment. Further consideration must be given for: • Trapping when used to capture wildlife - the wellbeing of both target and non-target animals must be as per The Code section 3.3.35.

Form section	Guidance
	• Wet pitfall traps must not be used to capture vertebrate animals and If used to capture invertebrates, they must comply with The Code section 3.3.36. • Transport of wildlife must be in accordance with The Code Clauses 3.2.5–3.2.8. • Animals held in captivity – give consideration to The Code section 3.3.38. • Procedures for any release of wildlife must ensure that release occurs as per The Code section 3.3.39. • Tracking the movement of wildlife by using devices needs to comply with The Code section 3.3.40.
4.3 Are there any potential hazards to other animals or humans?	Describe possibility of by-catch and ways to minimise impact. Investigators need to explain why there would not be any impact (or manipulation) on non-target species. Include consideration of "by-catch", which covers the capture of animals not covered by the Code as there can be a potential for by-catch of other animals covered under the Code. This section must be filled out if euthanasia may be required in unlikely but reasonably foreseeable circumstances. Add options for euthanasia methods and ensure competency of researchers performing euthanasia under s6. If there is no-one listed on the project, who will be present to kill the animal competently and humanely then you will need to provide details for seeking timely veterinary assistance. It is reasonably foreseeable injured wildlife requiring euthanasia may be encountered with projects in the field. Also: All persons involved in field surveys should follow a health and safety procedure for fieldwork. Please refer to La Trobe Health and Safety Procedure - Fieldwork Safety.
5.1 Housing of animals	For wildlife fieldwork you would usually answer No unless you are holding animals e.g. overnight. If so, complete the section 'Complete if standard LARTF housing is NOT used'
5.2 Location of activities involving animals	For field wildlife research complete the fieldwork section and the States and Territories question.
5.4 Animal welfare checks	Complete for field wildlife research involving housing / holding
5.5 Fate of animals at the conclusion of experiments	Complete for field wildlife research e.g., that animals are released to the wild