



Ecology Detection Dogs  
Britain & Ireland Working Group

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the Ecology Detection Dog Working Group (EDDWG)?

The Ecology Detection Dog Working Group is an open and collaborative forum that promotes the development of research-based standards, creates a culture of responsible dog use and promotes the capabilities of specially trained dogs and teams to advance ecological research and biodiversity protection. Our mission is to share knowledge and raise awareness on the use of dogs in ecology and conservation, ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

### 2. How do I join the EDDWG?

We welcome anyone interested in joining our community [to join the EDDWG as a member](#). It is currently free and allows access to the Member's Forum where you can contribute to the Research, and Training & Competency themes, connect with other members, and find events on the EDDWG calendar. As a member you will also have access to exclusive members only events.

### 3. What is an ecology detection dog?

An ecology detection dog (EDD) may also be known as a conservation detection dog (CDD) or wildlife detection dog (WDD). Dogs are trained to use their incredible sense of smell to detect a target scent and indicate its presence to the dog handler with either a passive (e.g., sit-stare) or active (e.g., bark) indication.

Target scent may include specific species, traces, or environmental issues related to conservation biology, such as plant, animal or fungal species. EDDs can be particularly useful for species at risk, or for potentially invasive species that must be controlled to prevent their spread or establishment. EDDs are used all over the world for a broad range of conservation issues, and the list of trained target scents continues to increase!

#### **4. What types of dogs can do detection work?**

All dogs are naturally skilled in scent detection, as it is their primary means of navigating the world around them. While there are no 'perfect' breeds for ecology detection, an athletic build and high drive is desirable to enable the dogs to focus on their work and not get too tired. Popular breeds include those that come from working backgrounds such as field-line spaniels, labradors, pointers, german shepherds and malinois. It is also important to match dogs to individual projects to ensure the dog's specific skill-set is appropriate for the work required.

#### **5. What species do ecology dogs detect?**

There is a vast range of species that ecology dogs have successfully been trained to detect. In the terrestrial environment, target scents include everything from bats to water voles and Japanese knotweed. Dogs can also be trained to detect aquatic species like signal crayfish! Many dogs are also trained on more than one target odour or species.

As we learn more about how dogs learn and differentiate scent, the number of target species will continue to grow, allowing ecology dogs to support a broad range of conservation, research and management projects across the world.

#### **6. I want to train my dog to do detection work, where do I start?**

There is no single 'correct' route into ecology detection dog work, and pathways vary. A great first step is to shadow an existing detection dog team. This helps you understand the realities of the job - including long hours, variable weather, and ecological fieldwork - and helps you decide if this is the right path for you and your dog. Volunteering is also a valuable way to gain insight into detection dog work.

New handlers should be prepared for a significant time and financial commitment to achieve the high standard required for operational deployment. Finding a mentor or experienced handler to guide you through this process is highly recommended.

Currently, there are no mandatory accreditations in the UK for operational ecology detection dog teams. However, several training courses and workshops are available from reputable providers that cover scent detection theory, field techniques, and species licensing.

The EDDWG promotes best practice at every stage and encourages open learning, mentoring, and collaboration. You can reach out to established handlers or groups via our Member's Forum to inquire about volunteering or shadowing opportunities.

## **7. What are the legal and licensing considerations for detection dog work?**

In the UK, detection work involving protected species (such as bats or great crested newts) often requires a licence to possess training samples or carry out surveys. Handlers must also hold appropriate insurance (comprehensive public liability insurance and professional indemnity insurance is strongly recommended) and follow animal welfare legislation. Survey work must comply with planning regulations, species protection laws, and relevant best practice guidelines. Depending on the working environment, additional risk assessments and permissions may also be required.

## **8. What does an operational dog team look like?**

Due to the variety of target odours, training methods and habitats the teams may work in, how teams present themselves can vary. But all teams should meet a minimum standard which may include an understanding of dog behavior, welfare standards, target species knowledge, and safe working/dog handling practices. Typically the team should demonstrate high levels of commitment and attention to detail, be used to working outdoors, and have proven dog handling and operational skills.

We are working on a guidance document that explores this important topic - so watch this space!

## **9. Are ecology detection dogs safe for wildlife and the environment?**

When used responsibly, ecology detection dogs are a safe and non-invasive survey tool. It is the responsibility of the handler to ensure surveys are appropriate for the site conditions and season. With proper planning and risk assessment, detection dogs can be a low-impact and highly effective conservation tool.

## **10. How can my organisation collaborate with EDDWG?**

We welcome partnerships with conservation organisations, universities, businesses, and agencies. Please contact us via our website to discuss potential collaborations or partnership opportunities.

## **11. Does EDDWG provide funding for research projects involving detection dogs?**

EDDWG itself does not directly fund projects, but we encourage and facilitate networking between members and funding bodies. We may also be able to support and collaborate on research grant applications where the use of ecology detection dogs is integral.

## **12. How do I contract a detection dog team?**

To find out more information on engaging a detection dog team and the steps to follow, please check out our page at [www.ecologydetectiondogwg.org/engage-team](http://www.ecologydetectiondogwg.org/engage-team)

You can also read our publication, ***Guidance on key questions for selecting a conservation detection dog team***, which is available on our website [www.ecologydetectiondogwg.org/publications](http://www.ecologydetectiondogwg.org/publications)