



Dorset
Wildlife Trust



Volunteer
Handbook

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Tern shelter building on Brownsea © Jonny Owen



1. Introduction

This handbook has been produced by the Volunteering team at Dorset Wildlife Trust. It acts as a useful reference guide covering the main factors involved in volunteering for the Trust.

It is intended that this handbook should be available either as hard copy or online via the website.

Any comments or queries on the contents of this handbook should be directed to the volunteering team on [01202 692033](tel:01202692033) or email to volunteering@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk.



Common blue damselfly on sunbaw © Nigel Brooks



2. Our Vision and Mission

Our vision is a Dorset rich in wildlife for everyone.

Our mission is to champion wildlife and natural places and to inspire people to value and take action for nature.

Dorset Wildlife Trust is the leading charity dedicated to nature conservation in Dorset. From small beginnings in 1961 based entirely on voluntary effort, we now have over 27,000 members, 40 nature reserves, four visitor centres and a thriving programme of outreach with communities and land and sea managers.

As a charity we have grown but we have never lost our volunteer ethos and rely on the support of thousands of people.

3. Why Volunteer?

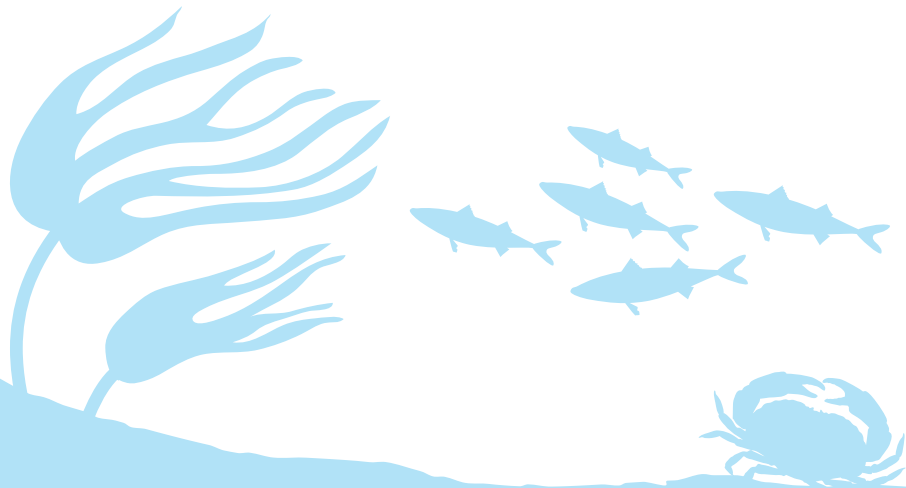
Volunteering with us is packed with all sorts of different tasks. Some examples include clearing scrub, safe bonfires, maintaining fencing, paths and boardwalks, installing signs, wildlife surveys with associated training, helping greet visitors and engaging the public with events and activities. Volunteers work alongside our staff in just about every aspect of our work and are highly valued.

Without our volunteers, Dorset Wildlife Trust simply would not be able to function as well as it does - and all our staff fully recognise this fact. Volunteering not only provides us with a dedicated and loyal army of helpers - it also provides a means for individuals to be engaged with local conservation projects literally on their doorstep. This helps us all to value wildlife and to recognise that it is all around us - even in the middle of large towns.

Volunteers come to us for all sorts of reasons:

To do their bit, to get healthy, to stay healthy, for the social element, for fun, for the challenge, to learn new skills, to practise old skills, to prepare for the workplace, to help wildlife, to get out into the fresh air, to learn about wildlife, to carry on using skills during retirement - and occasionally it's just to give it a go.

We have a broad range of opportunities to suit most people. In 2023, 94% of volunteers rated their experience of volunteering for Dorset Wildlife Trust as 'Good' or 'Excellent' - so why not put us to the test?





Volunteers at Kimmeridge Bay © Julie Hatcher



4. Tasks and Opportunities

We have opportunities for volunteers in every line of our work - from office-based work at the centres, to leading work parties out on the reserves, and pretty much everything in between. A lot will depend on your own level of experience and skills - plus of course, what appeals to you and what you want to do.

Practical Work

Working outside in the depths of the Dorset countryside can be very rewarding and is hugely popular with our volunteers. There are regular work parties across the county - all led by experienced staff and volunteers. These work parties carry out a wide variety of tasks revolving around habitat management, path restoration work and construction, to name but a few.

Surveys

Monitoring of wildlife is an essential part of any conservation task - and volunteers are important to this. Regular training sessions are held to help develop identification skills for target species. Survey work can be carried out anywhere, and there is even a Dorset Wildlife Trust project to survey for wildlife in your own garden or local greenspace.

Indoor Work

If the idea of being outside in all weathers doesn't appeal, there are also lots of opportunities to volunteer indoors at one of the Dorset Wildlife Trust Centres. Typical work in the office will involve data entry, reception, project support and general office administration.

Engagement

Are you a people person? Our ambition is to inspire 1 in 4 people to be active for wildlife by 2030. To do this, we need passionate volunteers to support various community engagement programmes. This includes greeting visitors to our reserves and centres, assisting with activities for day visitors like pond-dipping, supporting delivery of wildlife-based activity groups and assisting with outreach and school trips, designing and creating engagement props & resources.



Volunteering at Home

You don't even have to leave the comfort of your own home to be an effective and valuable volunteer! We have monitoring projects such as Species of the Month that help us to track populations of some of Dorset's key species - this can be done for your own garden or local patch.

Other opportunities for volunteering from home include writing articles for use in local newspapers or for use on the website, inputting data for species or event records or maybe co-ordinating or delivering talks on behalf of the Trust.

Family Volunteering

There are opportunities suitable for the whole family to get involved such as beach cleaning, building bird boxes, assisting with surveys and many more...



5. Registration and Induction

All our volunteers are asked to register with us by completing a short and simple online registration form. The information is then used to:

- Enable us to contact you and support your volunteering.
- Ensure that you are covered by our insurance whilst working as a volunteer.

The information will be held on our volunteers' database and is only made available to the appropriate managers or leaders of specific volunteers.

Details of any volunteer will be treated as confidential and will only be used for the purpose of volunteer management at Dorset Wildlife Trust. Details will not be passed on to any third party without the consent of the individual concerned.

Please refer to the Dorset Wildlife Trust data retention policy found on the Dorset Wildlife Trust website for further information.

Volunteers will be issued with a lapel badge as soon as they become active volunteers. Induction training will vary considerably depending on the role or opportunity.

All volunteers will be given relevant information about the Trust, which will also be available on the website.

Induction training will:

- Include the wider volunteering opportunities that may be available for progression into more specific roles.
- Introduce the individual to the general volunteer agreement, as well as any other task-oriented agreements that may be relevant.
- Ensure that the volunteer is aware of the member of staff responsible for them, who will act as their liaison point in case of any problems.

Health and Safety aspects will be covered during induction, and prior to each task.

Induction training for young people and for those volunteers with specific volunteer roles will be recorded in the Induction form, to be signed by the individual.



Jonny Owen working with children @ Dorset Wildlife Archive

6. Volunteer Agreements

The Trust utilises Volunteer Agreements to enable all volunteers to have a clear understanding of their role as a volunteer. The general agreement is applicable to all volunteers. There are also specific agreements for Key Volunteers - i.e. working with children, vulnerable adults, handling finances, directly representing the Trust and for volunteers whose work involves adhering to safety procedures.

Volunteering Agreements between the Trust and its volunteers are binding in honour, trust and mutual understanding only and are not to be treated as a legally binding contract of employment.

Volunteer Agreement

Volunteers are an important and valued part of Dorset Wildlife Trust. We hope that you enjoy volunteering with the Trust and feel part of our team.

This agreement tells you what you can expect from us, and what we ask of you in return. A volunteer is someone who carries out occasional activities on behalf of the Trust.

Dorset Wildlife Trust will:

- Provide a designated supervisor for each task.
- Provide information into how the organisation works and your role within it.
- Provide relevant training for the tasks that we ask you to carry out.
- Provide Employers Liability insurance.
- Provide safety clothing and equipment as appropriate.
- Ensure you are in a safe working environment.
- Reply to queries within 10 working days.

Volunteers are expected to:

- Carry out their task(s) to the best of their ability.
- Adhere to any Health & Safety directives issued as part of the training for any task.
- Interact courteously with the public when carrying out Dorset Wildlife Trust business/activities.
- Take good care of Dorset Wildlife Trust resources and equipment.
- Inform their supervisor if they can no longer carry out a voluntary task, or undertake it at the agreed time.
- Give as much or as little time as they consider appropriate to them.



7. Trust Contacts

The volunteering team is the main contact for any volunteering query. We can be contacted by:

Phone 01202 692033

Email volunteering@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Dorset Wildlife Trust HQ

Brooklands Farm, Forston, Dorchester, DT2 7AA
01305 264620 • enquiries@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Urban Wildlife Centre

Beacon Hill Lane, Corfe Mullen, BH21 3RX
01202 692033 • urban@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Fine Foundation Wild Seas Centre

01929 481044 • kimmeridge@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Lorton Meadows

01305 816546 • lorton@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Brownsea Island

01202 709445 • brownsea@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Kingcombe Centre

01300 320684 • kingcombe@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Fine Foundation Wild Chesil Centre

01305 206191 • chesilcentre@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

8. Communications

Regular communication with volunteers is an essential resource for both parties.

The Volunteering Co-ordinator is responsible for the provision of a monthly e-newsletter for volunteers which provides relevant information, regular tasks and other opportunities.

Volunteer day © Jon Hawkins



Kimmeridge volunteers © Phil Abraham





North Dorset volunteers faggot making © Ben Atkinson



Office volunteer © Sarah Pritchard



9. Training of Volunteers

The amount and nature of training offered to volunteers will vary according to the roles being carried out and any existing experience and skill levels. The Trust will endeavour to provide appropriate training where required, enabling all volunteers to feel confident and competent when carrying out tasks.

Training will be delivered internally where possible and will include instructions on the safe use of tools and equipment for each practical work party before commencing any tasks. External organisations may be used to deliver training for more specific qualification based examples.

General identification workshop training will take place on an annual basis to allow less experienced volunteers the opportunity to carry out survey work throughout the summer months.



10. Health and Safety

Dorset Wildlife Trust has a Health and Safety Policy, and volunteers are treated in the same manner as staff for the purposes of health and safety.

Volunteers will be provided with the relevant protective equipment where it is deemed necessary for a particular task, and will be expected to follow the guidelines as set in the Volunteer Agreement for Health & Safety (see page 9).

Age restrictions are in place for young volunteers as follows:

Aged up to 16 years

Must be accompanied by parent/guardian

Aged 16/17 years

Parental consent form to be completed

Aged 18 or over

No restrictions

11. Equal Opportunities



The Dorset Wildlife Trust Equal Opportunities Policy provides a framework for ensuring fair treatment and the absence of discrimination in all practices and procedures, including volunteering.

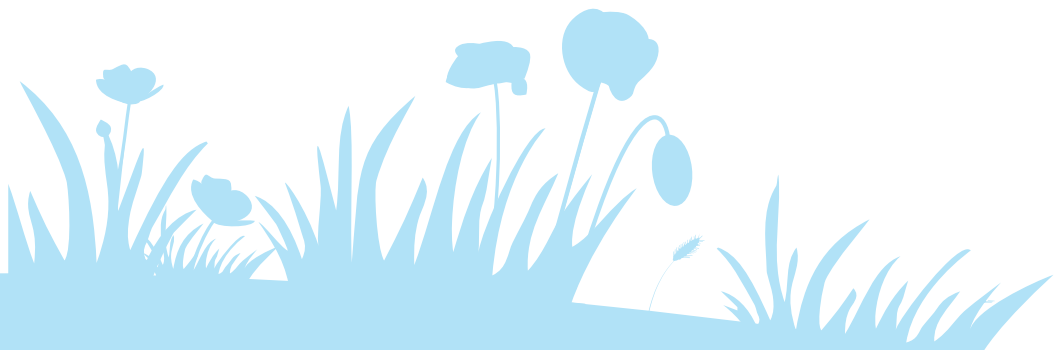
Dorset Wildlife Trust will also work towards ensuring:

We have diverse and inclusive leadership. Our movement will be led by diverse, inclusive and effective leaders who embrace the challenge of increasing our diversity and recognise the contribution diversity makes to our movement and to wildlife.

We are increasing our diversity. We will become more relevant to more people by ensuring our staff, trustees, volunteers and members reflect the diversity of the communities in which we live and work, by increasing opportunities and reducing barriers for marginalised or disempowered groups.

We are communicating inclusively. The ways that we connect with our staff and communities will be intentionally inclusive and nurture a sense of belonging. We will demonstrate solidarity for people from different backgrounds, abilities and identities, and ensure they are empowered to change the natural world for the better.

We support access and engagement for everyone. We will increase our engagement with diverse communities, to better understand and overcome barriers to accessing and engaging with nature and to ensure that everyone can benefit from the joy of wildlife in their daily lives.



12. Safeguarding

Dorset Wildlife Trust recognises the need to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all staff, volunteers and the public. A designated safeguarding officer (DSO) and Deputy DSO are responsible for Dorset Wildlife Trust procedures regarding working with children, young people and vulnerable adults. DBS checks are carried out on relevant staff and volunteers as required. A copy of the Dorset Wildlife Trust safeguarding policy and procedures is available on request.

13. Insurance

Volunteers are covered by the Trust's insurance policy whilst undertaking authorised voluntary work for the Trust. This section is a summary guide. Any claim will depend on the precise terms and conditions of the policy.

Employer's liability

Provides cover against claims for damages arising from the illness, injury or death of an employee or volunteer, which results from negligence by the Trust or failure to take reasonable care.

Public liability

Provides cover against injury, loss or damage caused to any third party and their property arising from acts of negligence by the Trust or anyone acting with the Trust's authority.

Note that no cover is provided for loss or damage to personal possessions whilst volunteering.

14. Expenses

Expenses are not freely available for every volunteering opportunity but may be paid if agreed beforehand for specific cases. Travel expenses may be available for certain projects dependent on the funding provided for volunteering within the project budget. This will cover your travel to and from the place at which we have asked you to work. If you are unsure about your eligibility for expenses please ask your staff contact for details. All volunteering expense claims must be agreed in advance by the project budget holder.

15. Volunteering and Jobseeker's Allowance

Recent changes in legislation now mean that the 15 hour limit on volunteering no longer exists. Jobseeker's Allowance will not normally be affected by voluntary work as long as:

- You continue to look for employment.
- You can be contacted promptly if a job opportunity arises.
- You are willing and able to start a new job.
- You are able to attend an interview at 48 hours notice.

Please note that this is a general guide only. You are advised to check the exact status with the appropriate agency.

16. Complaints Procedure

The Trust has a complaints procedure to ensure that all complaints and grievances are dealt with quickly and effectively.

Dorset Wildlife Trust aims to make all volunteering experiences positive and enjoyable, treating all volunteers equally, fairly and objectively. We do realise however, that difficult situations may arise from time to time. In such instances, the volunteer should refer the matter to their staff contact for the problem to be addressed accordingly. Alternatively, the volunteer can refer their concerns to the volunteering co-ordinator for appropriate further action.

17. The Social Aspect

In recognition of the efforts of all our volunteers throughout the year, Dorset Wildlife Trust organises social events for volunteers.

The events provide a format whereby ALL volunteers may come along, free of charge, and celebrate volunteering with Dorset Wildlife Trust staff and other volunteers. These events take the form of teas, BBQ's etc and may also include guided walks where possible.



Kimmeridge Bay © Julie Hatcher



And finally ...

All that is left to say now is a huge thanks to you and to all our volunteers - for all your time, your hard work, your ideas and the enjoyment of your company.

The strength of Dorset Wildlife Trust is dependent on the partnership between volunteers and staff, working together to help conservation in Dorset, so whatever time you give - many thanks!

Any suggestions or comments on volunteering or on this handbook are most welcome by phone to [01202 692033](tel:01202692033) or email volunteering@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk.



snorkeller © Julie Hatcher





“No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced.”

Sir David Attenborough



Survey volunteers © Steve Masters



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