

# Volunteer Handbook



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## 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 642788 or email to [sdavis@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:sdavis@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk) .

## 2. Why Volunteer?

Volunteering for DWT is not just about working outside cutting down scrub - although there are plenty of these opportunities out there! Volunteers work alongside our staff in just about every aspect of the Trust, and are highly valued.

Without our volunteers, the Trust would simply not be able to function as well as it does - and all of our staff fully recognise this fact.

Volunteering doesn't just provide 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 practice 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 like to think that we have the ideal opportunity for everyone who comes to us - so why not put us to the test?

### 3. Tasks and Opportunities

As mentioned earlier, volunteering with Dorset Wildlife Trust is not all about cutting and burning scrub.

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 integral 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 DWT 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 DWT Centres. Typical work in the office will involve data entry, reception, project support and general office administration.

**Area Groups** DWT has a number of area groups which are run by a committee of volunteers. The groups provide a local Trust focus, and organise walks, talks and other activities for their local community. There are of course many opportunities to volunteer with an area group, either as part of the committee or as a walk leader, or a speaker.

**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 Wildlife on your Doorstep 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...

#### 4. Registration and induction

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

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

The information will be held on our volunteer's 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.

The Registration form is available as a leaflet or can be completed online at the volunteering pages of the DWT website.

Volunteers will be issued with a volunteer card and 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 generic 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 also 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.

## 5. 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 Volunteer Reserve Wardens and for Key Volunteers - ie. Working with children, vulnerable adults, handling finances, directly representing the Trust and for volunteers whose work involves adhering to safety procedures.

Agreements for Volunteer Wardens and for Key volunteers will be a more formal document that will be signed by both the volunteer and their designated DWT staff contact.

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.

A copy of the general volunteer agreement is situated on the following 2 pages:

# **Volunteer Agreement**

Volunteers are an important and valued part of Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT). 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 DWT business/activities.
- Take good care of DWT 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.

Your DWT staff focal point for any questions or concerns is:

Steve Davis, Volunteering Programme Manager\*.

Tel: 01202 642788

Email: [sdavis@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:sdavis@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)

\*Note:

The staff focal point for some volunteers may differ. As an example, the Otter group volunteers would have the River and Wetlands Officer as their main contact.

## 6. Trust Contacts

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

Phone: 01202 642788

Email: [volunteering@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)

Trust Office Brooklands farm, Forston, Dorchester DT2 7AA	Phone: 01305 264620 <a href="mailto:enquiries@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk">enquiries@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk</a>
Urban Wildlife Centre Beacon Hill Lane, Corfe Mullen BH21 3RX	Phone: 01202 692033 <a href="mailto:urban@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk">urban@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk</a>
Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve	Phone: 01929 481044 <a href="mailto:kimmeridge@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk">kimmeridge@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk</a>
Lorton Meadows	Phone: 01305 816546 <a href="mailto:lorton@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk">lorton@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk</a>
Brownsea Island	Phone: 01202 709445 <a href="mailto:brownsea@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk">brownsea@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk</a>

## 7. Volunteering working Group

In line with good working practices and to conform to the 'REACH' quality framework for volunteering, a volunteering working group is in place. The group consists of representatives from other volunteering organisations plus volunteers from a wide range of activities and ages. The group meets regularly to discuss volunteering plans and address any issues as they arise.

## 8. 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.

## 9. Communications

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

The Volunteering Programme Manager is responsible for the provision of a monthly e-bulletin for volunteers.

This consists of an HTML based email to all registered volunteer email addresses. The e-bulletin provides relevant volunteering information as well as a calendar of forthcoming tasks and opportunities. It allows the use of media such as pictures and video that volunteers can use to demonstrate their work. The e-bulletin is also available by download from the Trust website ( [www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk) ).

A volunteering section is provided in the Trust Newsletter. This is a more general coverage of volunteering news but it does provide useful information for those members that do not have access to email or the internet.

Volunteers that are not members and do not have an email registered in the database will get a paper copy of the bulletin sent by post every 6 months.

All regular volunteering tasks and opportunities are listed in the Events Guide, a booklet that accompanies the Trust Newsletter.

## 10. Health and Safety

DWT 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 follow the guidelines as set in the Volunteer Agreement for Health & Safety (see page 7/8)

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

## 12. Insurance

Volunteers are covered by the Trusts 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.

## 13. 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 dependant 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.

#### 14. Volunteering and Jobseekers 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.

#### 15. Complaints Procedure

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

DWT 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, volunteers or staff may approach the Volunteering Programme Manager to resolve matters through the complaints procedure.

#### **16. Volunteer Award**

An annual award will be made each year to the volunteer deemed to be most worthy of selection for the Helen Brotherton Award for Volunteering.

Nominations for the award may be made by staff or volunteers. Nomination forms will be distributed via the web site and through leaflets.

The award will consist of a bronze, engraved medal and will be presented at the Annual General Meeting.

#### **17. The Social Aspect**

In recognition of the efforts of all our volunteers across the year, DWT organises an annual social event for volunteers.

The event provides a format whereby ALL volunteers may come along, free of charge, and celebrate volunteering with Dorset Wildlife Trust staff and other volunteers. These events will take the form of teas, BBQ's etc and may also include guided walks where possible. The location of the event will vary each year and will be easily accessible.

## 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 revolves 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 642788 or email [sdavis@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:sdavis@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)