



Reserve Volunteer Handbook

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Introduction

The Trust was formed in 1961 by a group of local people who had concerns about the increasing loss of wildlife in the county. The Trust has since gone from strength to strength and now has 26,500 members and up to 500 volunteers on its database. From the beginning, the Trust has relied on the vital contribution made by volunteers. The scale and diversity of volunteering provides the Trust with flexibility and a wide skills base to call upon. We hope that volunteering and the opportunity to contribute to the work of Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust will bring you enjoyment and new challenges.

Reserve Volunteers

What is a reserve volunteer?

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust has over 60 Nature Reserves across the whole of the County. With such a large number of reserves, our reserve team is always looking for help. We need eager volunteers who enjoy working outdoors, cutting, burning and planting to protect and restore our reserves. We have a variety of habitats including: ancient woodland, wetland, heathland and grassland. Join one of our pre-existing reserve groups and help to protect wildlife in your area or become part of a pre-existing project (subject to availability) and help restore a home for nature.

Duties/ Responsibilities (dependent on assigned group)

- To assist with woodland management
- Restore heathland habitats
- Remove scrub
- Remove invasive plant species
- Burn unwanted vegetation
- Help maintain our rare floristically diverse meadows
- Help with our seasonal coppice program
- Maintain our nature reserve features.
- Restore paths, fences and gates to maintain open access for visitors
- Access to own transport due to many of our reserves being far away from public transport. We can sometimes offer lift shares however this will need to be discussed separately.
- We provide all the tools for the day but advise you to bring warm clothes, waterproofs, walking boots preferably steel toe capped, something to eat and drink. **Please note** Some reserves may require wellington boots.

Insurance and safe guards

Volunteers are insured under our public liability insurance. Risk assessments will be completed for all activities so that potential hazards are prepared for. You will generally be working on Trust owned sites which are open to the public however if you are asked to undertake a project off of Trust land permission will be sought by GWT beforehand. You will generally be

accompanied by a member of staff during your volunteering however there are some survey groups who work separately from Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. In these cases it is advised you always undertake survey work in groups.

Who to report to:

You will be assigned a supervisor depending on your reserve area. If you have any issues or questions you are welcome to contact your Volunteer Coordinator. Contact details can be found at the end of this document.

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's aims for volunteers

- Recognise volunteering as an established area of the Trust, valuing their contributions to the Trust and their local community.
- Provide and maintain a safe and healthy environment for all volunteers and staff and to give appropriate training, induction and supervision for their welfare.
- Recruit volunteers for specific roles, matching Trust needs with volunteers' skills, knowledge and experience.
- A commitment to equal opportunities and believes for all volunteers and staff. Further details can be found in the Trusts Equal Opportunities Policy.
- Recognise Volunteer contribution to Trust and individual volunteer's motivations within the scope of the Trust's needs and resources.
- Appreciates that all offers of help should be acknowledged, but realises that not all offers can be taken up.
- Ensure all volunteers are trained correctly so that they can carry out their role to best effect.
- Committed to implementing and improving standards and best practice for the management and resourcing of voluntary activity by carrying out an annual Volunteer Investment and Value Audit.
- Look for new opportunities for volunteers to become involved in the work of Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

Volunteering Guidelines

As a volunteer you have a designated member of staff or fully-trained volunteer to guide and advise you in your role. Your role description names that person and you should try to have regular contact with them. We also aim to hold at least one social event for all volunteers each year. This is an opportunity to meet other volunteers and Trust staff.

A Volunteers Coordinator is also available to give advice, information and support and to deal with any complaints by or about volunteers.

Representing the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

As a volunteer you are an important ambassador for the Trust and should always try to represent its best interests. Volunteers are often seen as "the face" of the Trust and offer the first point of contact for many members of the public who are potential new Trust members and supporters. It is therefore important when representing the Trust that anything you do say to the public reflects the aims, objectives and visions of the Trust. Training will be provided if you are in a public speaking role. If you are ever asked a question you are not sure about, please refer it onto a member of staff. You can also find a brief overview of our aims in the Trust's Strategic Plan, which can be found on our website, on our [who we are page](#)

Attendance

Attendance is not compulsory in voluntary positions however it is important to inform us if you cannot attend so that alternative arrangements can be made. Some projects will need regular commitment from volunteers if you feel you can only offer ad-hoc volunteering please let us know as we can offer other opportunities. The Trust realises that volunteers can decide to leave their voluntary position at any time. If you feel unable to continue volunteering for the Trust, we would be grateful if you could let us know as soon as convenient. Likewise, we will inform you if we can no longer make good use of your contribution.

Confidentiality

As a volunteer you may be party to information about other volunteers, Trust members or information which is not in the public domain. This information must be kept confidential at all times and not be misused. If you are unsure, please ask your supervisor. Where needed, we can provide data protection training.

Communication

It is vital to ensure that such a large organisation works effectively. Trust staff aim to keep volunteers informed of current developments within the Trust and of any matters which affect volunteer roles on a regular basis. We have a monthly volunteer e-newsletter, sent out to all registered volunteers and contains important information for volunteers about the Trust, including upcoming events, potential training opportunities, volunteer stories and new volunteer roles. Please do take the time to read this publication! Your

assigned supervisor will also provide you with regular updates about the Trust.

Claiming Expenses

All volunteers can claim out-of-pocket expenses which must be agreed with your supervisor when you start volunteering. This includes claiming mileage for travel to and from your place of volunteering (up to a 40 mile round trip at 35p per mile). You are asked to complete a Volunteer Expenses Form and submit this to your supervisor for authorisation on a monthly basis. PPE expenses explained in the next section.

Tools and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The Trust will provide all tools and ensure PPE is provided to all volunteers. We unfortunately cannot cover the cost of volunteer steel toe cap boots and wellingtons. The Trust can however provide spare steel toe cap wellingtons and boots, which can be loaned out to a volunteer on the day, as long as advance notice is given. **Please note** we have a limited number of boots in limited sizes so please check in advance as we may need to order the correct size boots or wellingtons for you.

Volunteers who have qualifications and approval by their supervisor to use relevant machinery such as chainsaws and brushcutters will need specialised PPE such as chainsaw trousers and boots. The Trust will purchase and cover the cost of this PPE as long as the volunteer provides information on sizes and is cleared to use the machinery within their role.

For day to day activity on our reserves we recommend volunteers to wear steel toe cap boots, waterproofs, old clothes and where advised steel toe wellingtons boots. The Trust will provide you with gloves, and where appropriate, hardhats, ear defenders and eye protection.

Recording your Contribution

Your contribution to the work of the Trust is greatly appreciated. In order for us to allocate resources to volunteers and the work that is carried out, it is helpful to know the amount of time you spend volunteering. While out on site with us we will ask you to sign the risk assessment. This not only gives you the opportunity to read the risk assessment but allows us to record your volunteer activity. For those volunteers not part of a practical group, we will instead ask you to complete a record of your hours through the Volunteer Hours Form or by completing our quarterly online volunteer hour's survey.

Vehicle Usage

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust has a limited pool of vehicles which may be available for use by volunteers for certain tasks. Volunteers who wish to use a Trust vehicle should ask their supervisor for further information. Any person who drives a Trust vehicle must submit a copy of their driver's license for inspection, have an acceptable claims and conviction record and sign a copy of the Trusts vehicle policy.

Health & Safety

In terms of health and safety, there is no difference between a paid member of staff and a volunteer. The Trust is committed to providing a safe working environment and will provide appropriate instruction, supervision and training to ensure the health and safety of its staff and volunteers.

As a volunteer, you have a duty of care for your own safety and that of others around you.

- You should always ensure that your own actions do not affect the safety of other volunteers and staff with whom you are working.
- You should always report any defects to equipment or any accidents that have occurred, to your supervisor.
- Always ensure that you are wearing any appropriate safety clothing for the role that you are carrying out.
- If you are working alone, you must follow the Trusts Lone Working Policy. Full details of this system and other essential information can be found in the Trusts Health & Safety Statement, which is available from your supervisor.

Practical Habitat Management

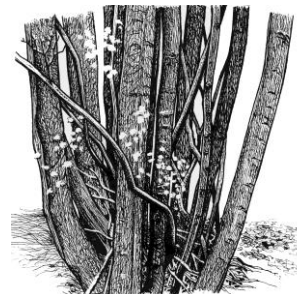
The Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust is a county wide charity working to protect the wildlife and wild places of Gloucestershire. In addition to identifying key areas of nature conservation importance and educating and advising the public, the Trust manages 83 nature reserves covering over 2,000 acres of prime wildlife habitat.

Why Manage?

All habitats on Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust nature reserves are more or less directly the result of human management in the past. If no conservation management is carried out, the vegetation will change, possibly resulting in loss of species for which the reserve was established and preventing people from enjoying the site.

The aim of management may be:-

- To halt succession by cutting or grazing. The continuation of these management practices will prevent rank grasses and scrub invading, therefore maintaining optimum conditions for wild flowers.
- To reintroduce traditional woodland management techniques such as coppicing. Over the past few centuries many woodlands have not been managed and have fallen into a state of neglect. Techniques such as coppicing result in the woodland having a greater diversity of species present, as was found there in the past.



Some reserves require complex intensive management, whilst others can be left to minimal intervention. However, all reserves need to have a well maintained infrastructure such as footpaths, fences and gates as well as signs to inform visitors. It is true to say, that to do nothing to a reserve, is to aid in its deterioration in the long term.

What do you do?

To help manage these significant resources successfully, the Trust calls on the help of its practical volunteers who carry out management work on sites in their local area. *You are given a list of work that is being carried out in your area and then you chose which task to attend.* The work is varied and requires its members to be fit and active with an interest in the conservation of the countryside.

As a nature reserve volunteer you are an active member of the Trusts volunteer workforce and have a specific role to play in the management of Trust nature reserves. The work that the volunteers carry out on reserves is of vital importance to the future of the site and every hour of work carried out by volunteers helps to secure that future.

Health and safety should be given your full attention at all times. It is important that you follow the guidelines given in the “Health and Safety for Outdoor Workers” section in this booklet. As part of this, you should also read the section on “Using Hand Tools”. This gives further information about tools usage and health and safety considerations.

Task Leaders

The most valuable asset to you when working as a volunteer on a nature reserve is the task leader. He/she will give you full instructions for the day and you should adhere to them at all times. They will be responsible for the vehicle, mobile phone and first aid box if required. The task leader can also give you details about the site on which you are working and reasons for carrying out the task. They will also be able to assist you, should you be unfamiliar with any aspect of the task. They may also have specialist knowledge about the wildlife found on site, or at least be able to tell you some background information which may help you to carry out your work.

What next?

As a volunteer, it is important that you enjoy the work that you do for the Wildlife Trust and staff are always pleased to listen to any feedback that you may have.

Remember that you must always contact the Trust if you are intending to attend a task, to ensure:-

- That the task is still running
- Where to meet and at what time
- If there are any special instructions

Health and Safety Information for Outdoor Workers

This information must be read and understood by all parties carrying out practical work on Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves and should be read before arriving on site.

- Every tool has a specific use and must only be used for what it is intended. Using tools in the wrong way can be dangerous to yourself and other workers.
- Please read the booklet “Using Hand Tools” before starting work.
- Power tools such as brush cutters may only be used on production of the relevant certification and with prior permission from Trust staff.

First Aid

- Make sure that you know the location of the First Aid Box and mobile phone.
- The task leader or another nominated person will be qualified in first aid.

Protective Clothing

- Strong boots or Wellingtons, preferably steel toe-capped, must always be worn.
- Always have a waterproof jacket with you on site.
- In winter: - wear warm clothing in plenty of layers rather than thick bulky items, as these restrict movement.
- In summer: - wear lightweight, practical clothing but not loose fitting, with a hat to protect from strong sun, and wear sun screen.
- Always tie back long hair and remove loose jewellery.

General Health

- Always inform the task leader if you have any allergies or conditions such as asthma.
- Never overwork yourself. Always remember you can do as little or as much work as you feel able to do. Take frequent breaks and do not allow yourself to get too hot or cold.

Outdoor diseases

The following are conditions which may be contracted whilst working in the countryside. Simple precautions will ensure that you are not put at risk. The task leader will inform you should there be a risk present on the site you are working.

- Tetanus can be contracted through a dirty wound. Ensure that you are up to date with your tetanus immunisation and check your suitability for the injection with your doctor.

- Weil's Disease can be contracted through water in rivers, ponds and ditches. Always ensure that you wash your hands thoroughly before eating and keep cuts covered.
- Lyme Disease can be passed to humans by ticks which live on sheep or deer. Try to keep skin covered when working in areas where these animals are found.

These diseases are very uncommon and there are no known cases of conservation volunteers contracting any of the above.

For further information on these and other diseases which can be contracted whilst working in the countryside, please obtain a copy of the Health and Safety Strategy.

It is very important to take advice from the task leader and always ask if you are unsure about anything.

The above guidelines are for safe working practices and must be observed at all times.

General Risk Assessments

Hazard	Action required
Use of hand tools	Ensure tools are used as instructed.
Tree felling	Keep a safe working distance.
Heavy lifting	Always use correct technique.
Steep banks	Take extra care when working on slopes.
Slipping and tripping	Ensure care is taken when walking through muddy patches or over uneven terrain.
Proximity to water	Wash hands before eating to avoid risk of Weil's disease.
Cattle & sheep	Leave gates as you find them. Lyme disease can be contacted through tick bites so keep skin covered. Brucellosis can be contacted through cattle. Ensure loose dogs are controlled.
Public footpaths	Stop work when public passing by.

Safe Use of Hand Tools

Most of the practical conservation work carried out on Wildlife Trust nature reserves particularly that done by volunteers, is carried out with the use of hand tools. **It is imperative that only GWT hand tools are used whilst volunteering; do not bring along a tool from home, unless you have agreed with your supervisor otherwise.**

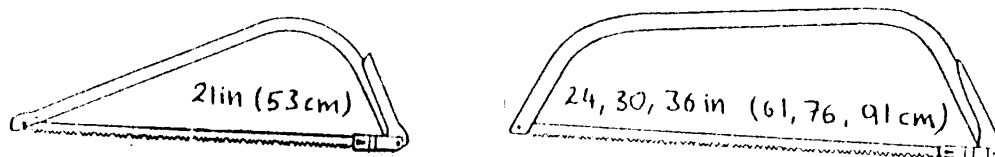
This is a guide on how to use the most frequently used tools safely, both for

your own health and those around you, as all tool use has some level of risk, both to the person using the tool and to others in the party or members of the public.

It is essential that all people involved in practical conservation work are shown how to use, carry and store these tools correctly before starting work. This not only makes the job easier to carry out, but also encourages safe working practices.

If the guidance and recommendations given in this booklet are observed, the risks involved should be minimised.

Bow saws: used for tree-felling, coppicing and scrub clearance.



- Use with one hand holding the saw and one holding steady the wood you are cutting. Keep this hand well clear of the blade as it could easily jump out of the cut.
- When carrying the saw, hold it down by your side with the blade facing down.
- Always place the saw on the ground when not in use. Never hang it from a tree or fence post.
- Choose the size of saw according to the size of timber you wish to cut. Never cut down a tree which is too big for the saw to handle.
- Use the full length of the blade and saw with easy relaxed strokes. Let the blade do the work - don't force it.
- Replace the blade if it is at all blunt, as a poorly maintained saw will make the work more hazardous.

Loppers: used for scrub clearance, pruning small shrubs and vegetation.

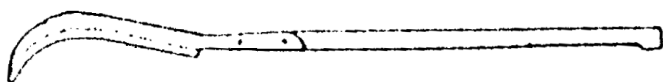
- Always cut across the grain of the wood and do not force the loppers.
- Do not exceed the cutting capacity of the loppers. Never cut a branch thicker than the width of your thumb.

Slashers: used for clearing brambles and other entangled vegetation.



Do not wear gloves when using a slasher as they make the handle difficult to grip, and it may slip and injure you.

- Keep a safe distance away from other people. Be aware of those around you and stop work if anyone comes close.
- Do not walk up to someone using a slasher without their knowledge. Always call to them first.
- Carry the slasher by your side with the blade facing the ground.

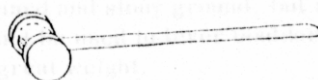


Other tools you may use less frequently:

Billhook: used for cutting wood less than 5cm in diameter.



Mell: used for driving in stakes and small fence posts



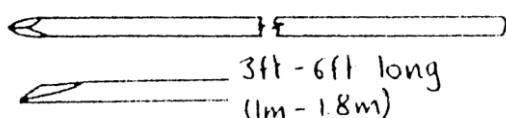
Mattock: used for grubbing and breaking up hard ground. The “axe” blade is useful for cutting roots.



Drivall: two-handed cylinders with a weighted end, used for driving in larger wooden posts.

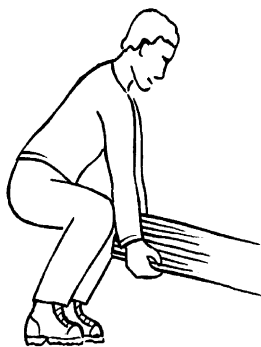


Crowbar: used as a lever for moving heavy objects such as rocks and for making post holes.



Safe Working Practices

- Always bend your knees when lifting heavy objects
- Carry all tools with the blades facing toward the ground
e.g. bowsaws, slashers, billhooks and mattocks



How to Perform Basic Tasks

How to coppice

1. Look carefully at the tree to decide which way to fell the individual stems.
Bear in mind:
 - Likely direction of fall.
 - Ease of cutting at the base.

- Intertwining tops.
 - Space to drop the stems.
 - Size of stem.
 - Wind direction and strength.
2. Remove any young growth around the outside of the stool cutting as close to the ground as possible and at an angle of 30-45 degrees sloping outwards.
 3. Keep a lookout and stop felling if people approach.
 4. Stems up to 8cm diameter can be cut straight through. Support the weight of the stem with one hand whilst sawing with the other, keeping well clear of the blade in case it jumps out.
 5. Larger stems should be undercut on the front (side facing the direction of fall) before being cut through from behind.
 6. Leave a stump 10-20cm high. It may be easier to cut higher than this initially and to trim the stump afterwards.
 7. If the tree gets hung up lift the butt and pull it briskly away.

Tools: Loppers - Bow saw - Bill hook.

How to clear scrub

1. Make sure you are aware of any trees/shrubs which should not be cut down.
2. For smaller diameter stems use loppers and cut as close to the ground as possible.
3. For larger stems use a bow saw (see 'How to Coppice') and again cut as close to the ground as possible. It may be easier to take out the tops of the scrub first and then deal with main stem.
4. Cut the removed stems into suitable lengths either for burning or stacking.

Tools: Loppers - Bow saw.

How to build fences

1. Work out the exact line of the fence and the positions of straining posts.



2. Make sure the fence line is clear of undergrowth, overhanging vegetation and old fence materials so you have room to work.
3. Dig holes and place strainers in at correct depth making sure they are upright.
4. Cut struts into strainers.
5. Attach a temporary wire, low down, between strainers, ensuring it is not too tight and does not catch the ground. This will guide the siting of intermediate posts.
6. Intermediate posts should be 2-3m apart for stock fencing.
7. Take care to ensure the posts are upright and in line and of equal height allowing for variation in ground level.
8. Ensure stock wire is correct way up with smaller section at the bottom.
9. At the first straining post:
 - Un-roll enough stock netting to tie off around first straining post.
 - Staple bottom and top wire ensuring that bottom wire is as low to the ground as possible.
 - Un-roll remaining wire keeping fingers free from netting and wearing gloves.
 - Ensure that all slack wire is taken up and fence line is free from snagging.
 - Use wire strainers to bottom and top wire and strain to required tension.
 - Staple bottom and top wires to second straining post.
 - Tension and staple middle wires at first and second straining posts.
 - Staple netting to intermediate posts.
 - Staples should be put in diagonally and only driven home on straining posts. On other posts the wire should be free to move.
10. Attaching the barbed wire:
 - Staple barbed wire to first straining post at the required height above the netting.
 - Mark the required height above netting on all intermediate posts.
 - Un-roll barbed wire ensuring gloves are worn.
 - Strain barbed wire to the required tension using wire strainers, ensuring that goggles are worn.
 - Staple wire to second straining post.
 - Staple barbed wire to intermediate posts at the required height above the netting.
11. Ensure all cut wire ends are sunk into posts.

Tools

Spade
Hammer
String line
Mell
Crow bar
Drivall
Wire cutters
Pencil
Crosscut saw
Wire strainers
Fencing pliers

Materials

Strainer posts
(e.g. 7' x 4-5" round tanalised posts)
Intermediate posts
(e.g. Half- round pointed tanalised posts)
Stock netting
Barbed wire
Staples and nails

Contact numbers

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