

Volunteer Handbook

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Welcome

Welcome to Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) and thank you for your support. This handbook is your guide to volunteering, containing everything you need to know.

If you have any questions you can also contact our Volunteer Coordinator at volunteering@gloucestershiREWildlifeTrust.co.uk or call 01452 383333.

CEO



Roger Mortlock, CEO

Roger Mortlock

Welcome to the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. I am delighted you are joining our volunteer team. Volunteers are the life-blood of GWT and power everything we do to secure nature's recovery in the county. They are all passionate about Gloucestershire's wildlife and bring a huge range of experience and skills to support our work.

There has never been a more important time to take action for wildlife and the environment. Our environment is under threat, but it's not too late to turn the tide on the losses to our wildlife. You really can make a difference to nature in our amazing county, and volunteering with GWT is a great place to start. We have volunteers from all ages and backgrounds who support our reserve management, community engagement surveys, fundraising, administration and much more! Whatever your interests, I hope we can find a role that suits you.

Your feedback really matters. Tell us about how you get on and ways we can improve the quality of your experience. I hope you enjoy volunteering with us.



Our values and mission

We have a vision where each year there is more wildlife, more wild places and more people with a connection to the natural world.

Our mission is to connect and improve Gloucestershire's wildlife and wild places.

About Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

GWT was formed in 1961, set up by a group of volunteers led by Sir Peter Scott, who recognised that local wildlife was under threat. We are a medium-sized charity working throughout Gloucestershire. As of 2019 we manage more than 60 Reserves across Gloucestershire, are supported by 29,000 members, have a team of over 540 active volunteers 12 Trustees and more than 60 staff. Our work of protecting Gloucestershire's wildlife is funded through our members, appeals, funded projects and our two limited companies, Gloucestershire Wildlife Management Ltd ([Wild Service](#)) and Gloucestershire Wildlife Enterprises Ltd (our cafes).

Managing nature reserves

The Trust's nature reserves are sites which are either owned or looked after by the Trust. Our management of them is an important way the Trust fulfils its mission to connect and improve the county's wildlife and wild places.

A Living Landscape

'Living Landscapes' is the Wildlife Trust's approach to conserving wildlife on a landscape scale. We are working to transform the environment we live in: restoring, recreating and reconnecting wildlife rich spaces in rural and urban areas by working in partnership with local communities, landowners, schools and businesses.

Providing natural solutions

We believe nature holds the solution to many of the issues we are dealing with today. If we look after it, it will look after us. We call this 'Natural Solutions'. We are working to reduce flooding and improve housing and commercial developments for wildlife through our Green Infrastructure Benchmark, "Building With Nature."

Working with communities

We work with communities, urban and rural, to get them outdoors and inspired for ecological restoration across the county. We help address people's health and wellbeing through the natural environment, we run events and courses, work with schools and undertake community based project to improve the environment.

Our Learning Programme

In order to protect the wildlife of the future, people need to have the opportunity to enjoy, explore and learn about local wildlife. We have programmes that encourage children from 0 to over 18 years to get closer to nature and provide opportunities for continued learning throughout life.

Survey and Monitoring

We are committed to ensuring the work we do for Gloucestershire's wildlife is beneficial. We run regular survey projects to monitor how our management work is benefiting wildlife.



Why volunteer?

Volunteering is a fantastic way to meet new people, do something you enjoy and make a positive difference to wildlife. Research shows volunteering and time outdoors improves mental and physical health. It is also a great way to learn new skills and give something back to your community.



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Who can volunteer?

Anyone 16 and over can volunteer. If aged 16-18 you will need to complete a parental consent form as part of your registration. We accept 14-15 year old volunteers, but this must be part of an organised school placement.

Job seekers allowance

As long as you meet the conditions of your benefits or tax credits you can volunteer as often as you like. Please refer to your Job Centre before you start to volunteer. As long as you continue to look for paid work and can attend an interview within 48 hours notice your benefits should not be affected. Volunteering can offer new skills and help with future employment.

Work experience and student internships

GWT values the importance of work experience and internships. We work closely with local schools, colleges and universities to develop placements. This can vary from week long-work experience, set hour placements in accordance with your course or a full time or part time gap year.



Equal opportunities

It is the policy of GWT to treat all employees and volunteers fairly and equally regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, marital status, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, age, disability or union membership status. The Trust wholly supports the principle of equal opportunities in employment and volunteering.

How we will support you through your volunteer journey

Before you start

Most volunteers' first point of contact will be our Volunteer Coordinator. They will provide you with information about our current volunteer opportunities based on your interests. Once you have agreed to a volunteer activity they will send you the volunteer registration and welcome pack. This will include this handbook, the volunteer signup form and any relevant role descriptions. Once you have returned your signup form you can start volunteering.

When you start

Once registered, the Volunteer Coordinator will put you in contact with your group or activity leader. This may be staff or another volunteer. They will provide details on start time and meeting point. On your first day the leader will introduce you to the group, explain a typical day, run through health & safety and provide required training. Training may occur on a separate day.

What to bring

You will be told what to bring prior to each session. Typically, however, for an outdoor task you will need to bring boots (preferably steel toe caps), outdoor clothes, waterproofs, water, lunch and sunscreen in hot weather.

Breaks and lunch

Times vary between groups but there will be a morning break and lunch.

How often

You are welcome to help as often as you like: weekly, monthly or whatever you feel comfortable committing to. We appreciate your donated time.

Travel expenses

Volunteers can claim up to a 40 mile roundtrip per day by car at 35p per mile, by bike at 15p per mile and for public transport (please keep a copy of your ticket). Expenses **must be claimed before the end of each tax year.**





On-going support

Training

As an active volunteer we will ensure you receive any relevant training before you start a new role with us. We will also review all our volunteer roles regularly to ensure all volunteers remain appropriately trained. If you feel your role could benefit from further training please do let us know. GWT budgets for training each year and are keen for feedback on how training can improve your role and support to GWT.

Volunteer newsletter

All volunteers can receive our monthly electronic volunteer newsletter. It is a fantastic way to keep up to date with what is happening at the Trust. It contains articles on the Trust's latest conservation work and projects, wildlife success stories, articles and photos written by fellow volunteers and information on new volunteer opportunities.

Volunteer Conference

Once a year GWT holds a Volunteer Conference. All volunteers are invited and it is a chance to hear about what other volunteers and groups are doing, meet volunteers from other areas, enjoy a buffet lunch and take a guided tour round a local nature reserve. We want to thank you for your hard work!

Volunteer Forum

Held every 6 months, each group can send a representative to discuss what is going well but also how GWT can better support its volunteers.

Volunteer awards

All our volunteers do an amazing job; we cannot thank you enough. Every year we hold our volunteer awards, to highlight a group and an individual volunteer who have gone the extra mile. Also, for long term volunteers we have volunteer badges to recognise your contributions.





Volunteer Agreement

We want your volunteering role to be both rewarding and enjoyable and for you to feel valued and part of the GWT team. This agreement has been created to ensure that both you as the volunteer and GWT are clear about expectations in regards to support, communication, health & safety and other procedures.



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This document is not in any way legally binding. It is an agreement in honour only and does not create any employment relationship between you and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

- **Be honest and open** with us from the start, tell us what skills and experiences you can bring and what you want to gain from volunteering. This will help us deliver a satisfying and rewarding experience for you.
- **To the best of your ability**, undertake your voluntary role; be punctual, reliable, and inform us in reasonable time if you are unable to attend something you have committed to.
- **Volunteering with others**: treat other volunteers and staff as you would like to be treated. Do not use offensive language or comments which may cause offence. Avoid comments which could be construed as sexist, racist, inappropriate or hurtful in anyway.
- **Follow Trust procedures** when volunteering. Consider relevant policies, including: Equal Opportunities, Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Vulnerable Adults and Child Protection policies. GWT will provide training.
- **Working with the public**: you are a representative of the Trust, anything that you say and do can be interpreted by members, other volunteers and the public as the views of GWT. When volunteering please be especially conscious of anything you say or do that could be misinterpreted, go against GWT views or negatively affect GWT's image. You are entitled to your own opinion, of course, but please make it clear when this is the case.
- **If you hear anything negative** about the Trust that concerns you please first discuss it with your assigned member of staff or the Volunteer Coordinator. We would much rather hear negative feedback first hand, and be able to right any issues before we hear it from outside the Trust.
- **Confidentiality and GWT's Data Protection Policy** must be adhered to when processing or coming into contact with confidential information as part of your voluntary role, whether this is about the organisation, staff, members or other volunteers. Training will be provided where required.

Recording volunteer hours

Recording your hours is really important. It not only shows how much time you have dedicated to helping Gloucestershire's Wildlife but also helps the Trust gain future funding through match funding, allowing us to further our work.

If you are joining a group led by staff your hours will be recorded on the risk assessment, in the office we have a sign-in book for recording hours. Those who help away from groups such as wardens, surveyors and Wildlife Watch will be given their own form to complete. In 2018 volunteers contributed over 30,000 hours of their time to the Trust. Thank you!

Running events

You can use your experience of public engagement and become one of our engagement leaders. Volunteers support our activities, events and courses programmes. Using their expertise to promote the work of the Trust, they help organise activities, events and courses such as bioblitzes, family days, walks, talks and many more. We will provide equipment and staff support.

Leading education sessions

We are aiming to engage with over 30,000 school children by 2022. This is an ambitious target which we could not achieve without our dedicated learning programme volunteers. Many of our education sessions are run by staff with volunteer support, but some aspects such as our Wildlife Watch, Primary School Quiz and Nature Tots groups are solely organised by volunteers. GWT will pay for appropriate training, safeguarding checks and equipment.

Leading other volunteers

We would not be able to run a number of our groups without our volunteer leaders. These volunteers have decided they would like more responsibility and take on or start up a team of volunteers. This could be to support our nature reserve management work, survey & monitoring, run aspects of our learning programme or lead events such as walks and talks . There is no pressure to take on extra responsibilities if you don't want to. For those who do, we will provide training, a staff member to support you, equipment & our volunteer leader's handbook.



Health and Safety

The Trust is committed to providing a safe working environment to everyone who volunteers. All volunteers must abide by our Health & Safety policy. All organised tasks are risk assessed and you will be informed of what Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) is required before you volunteer and any training provided before you start a new activity. A trained first aider will be with every group. Please read your copy of our Health & Safety policy which is included in your welcome pack.

Risk assessments

All tasks will be risk assessed. When volunteering outside you will be asked to sign the risk assessment after being informed of the relevant risks. Training will be provided for volunteers required to complete risk assessments.

Accident reporting

It's the responsibility of all to report any accidents or near misses (whether to themselves or others) to their supervisor. Staff will report any accidents you raised when required to RIDDOR.

Fire procedures

All Trust buildings have fire exits and alarms. You will be informed of fire procedures on arrival to a building. For fires on a reserve, group leaders will ensure

Emergency on site

All reserves have an emergency access point in the event of an emergency. The task leader and head office know where these locations are and can direct emergency services.

Lone working

The Trust's lone working policy must be read before lone working. When lone working you must let the Trust or an agreed personal contact know where you are and what time you will finish. In case of an emergency please contact your assigned supervisor.

Lifting and carrying

Before manually handling heavy objects consider if it needs moving at all; if so can it be moved using machinery or split into smaller loads? All staff and volunteers are responsible for lifting and carrying loads safely. When lifting, stand close to the object and keep a wide stance, be sure that footing is secure, while keeping feet pointed outwards and heels down. Bend knees and assume a safe lifting position by keeping back straight and chin in, pull the load close in to the body, ensuring the use of legs, not the back, to power the lift. Rise up from the squatting position using legs. Do not bend over at the neck, shoulders or waist and when carrying and do not twist the body. Take regular breaks.



Naturally occurring hazards



Lyme disease

An infection caused by *Borrelia* bacteria which is passed by infected ticks via their bite. Ticks can be picked up by walking through long vegetation. You are most likely to encounter them between April-October on habitats including grassland, woodland, marshland, heathland and moorland. When they bite they attach onto their hosts for a few days and drink blood. Signs of the disease can include a bullseye-like rash around the bite and possibly flu like symptoms. Please see photo to the right of bullseye rash. If symptoms appear, immediately consult your doctor and bring the tick with you if possible.



Leptospirosis or Weil's disease

Leptospirosis is rare in the UK. There are two strains: *Lepto. icterohaemorrhagiae*, carried by rats and other rodents via their urine. It is a dangerous disease, and can be found in water where rodents are present. *Lepto. hardjo* is associated with cattle and is found in areas frequented by these animals.

When working around water or cattle, keep wounds covered with waterproof dressings, wear gloves and wash your hands with hand sanitizer before eating or drinking. Do not drink the water and avoid it coming in contact with your mouth and eyes. If you develop flu-like symptoms after working near water or cattle visit your doctor and mention Weil's disease.

Poisonous plants and fungi

Our reserves may have poisonous or irritating plants and fungi. Please ensure you wear gloves when handling vegetation especially bracken and wash hands before eating or drinking. Do not eat any plants or fungi found on site. Your group leader will inform you of any dangerous vegetation on site.

Some of our sites do have giant hogweed and wild parsnip, the sap of which, on contact with skin and exposure to sunlight, burns the skin. Do not handle these plants.



Hypothermia and hyperthermia

Hypothermia is a condition resulting from a dangerous loss of body heat, often caused by inadequate clothing and accidental immersion in cold water. Symptoms include a lack of energy, loss of judgement and wanting to sleep. If you feel cold notify your volunteer supervisor, who will provide more layers and somewhere to warm up such as a car. Group leaders have the right to turn you away from volunteering if they believe you are inappropriately dressed so please bring correct clothing.

Hyperthermia (heat stroke) is a condition resulting from a dangerous gain in body heat. Excessive rise in body temperature (for example by 5 degrees) can lead to brain damage and death. The most frequent causes are muscular exercise in intense sun or high temperatures. Bring plenty of water to stay hydrated on hot days. If you feel you are getting too hot inform your volunteer supervisor, seek shade, in extreme cases sponge body with tepid water.

Rabies

Some species of bats in Europe carry a type of rabies virus called European Bat Lyssavirus (EBLV). In the UK the virus is occasionally found in Daubenton's bat. Only volunteers with a bat licence will be allowed to handle bats. A risk assessment must be completed before any surveys to ensure correct working practise.

Asbestos

Asbestos is a set of six naturally occurring minerals, which form long, thin fibrous crystals consisting of millions of microscopic fibres. These can get trapped in the lungs and cause damage over time. Volunteers are not allowed to work near asbestos. The most likely sources on Trust reserves are from fly-tipped waste in roof tiles, asbestos cement boards and old boilers or pipes. If you believe you have uncovered asbestos stop work and inform you volunteer supervisor immediately.



Blue green algae

Blue-green algae occurs naturally in a wide range of water bodies. Blooms may occur when nutrient levels are high, and particularly in still, calm weather. Blooms may result in scums forming on the water surface which may be blue-green, grey-green, greenish-brown or occasionally reddish-brown. Blooms and scums may release toxins. These toxins have caused the death of wild animals. In humans, rashes have occurred following skin contact, and illnesses have occurred when ingested. Anyone coming across a possible blue-green algal bloom or scum must inform their volunteer supervisor immediately.

Tool safety

Training will be provided on how to use each tool in correctly and safely.

Use of herbicide

Glyphosate/ Roundup Glyphosate can only be used by trained staff or volunteers. The only permitted application methods for volunteers is backpack with hand-held application for stump treatment. Trained volunteers must read our pesticide codes of practice before use. Ask your supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator for a copy.

Weather

Generally the Trust's reserve management and activities will go ahead regardless of the weather. However, extreme weather such as gale force winds may mean we will cancel a reserve task or an event.



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Animals on our reserves

Stinging and biting insects

Britain does not have any deadly venomous animals. However, stings and some bites can cause anaphylactic shock in some people. Please notify us on your volunteer form, if you are allergic.

Livestock

We use livestock on some of our reserves to help manage habitats. Please keep your distance and do not feed the animals. If you are a volunteer stock-watcher you will be given appropriate training in livestock management.

Wild boar

Although they tend to run away when they hear people, female boar with young may show aggression. Do not approach any wild boar, attempt to feed them or corner them. Back away slowly and keep your distance.

Adders

Adders may pose a risk on some sites. Adders are a venomous snake found on heaths, bogs, coastlands and woodlands, active from late February to late autumn. If bitten, inform your group leader immediately.

Dogs

We only allow assistance dogs while volunteering.





Control of Substances Hazardous to Health

COSHH is the law that requires employers to control substances that are hazardous to health and includes nanomaterials (very small material). GWT does use herbicides which are a COSHH substance. There is also a risk of COSHH material being fly tipped on our reserves. If you believe you have found a dangerous substance stop work immediately and leave the area, and inform your volunteer supervisor. If you have come in contact with the substance wash the substance off and seek medical advice.

Sharps and needles

Sharps may arise from GWT operations, for example badger vaccination, livestock management or may be encountered discarded on our land. Always wear gloves during practical management tasks or litter picking. If you encounter a needle inform your volunteer supervisor straight away who will dispose of it in a sharps box.

Food hygiene

Volunteers working within a public environment and handling food must undergo food hygiene training. This will be provided as part of your role. Bringing food to volunteer groups for sharing is permitted, as long as it is not sold. GWT holds no responsibility for food poisoning or allergies from food provided by one volunteer to other volunteers within the group.

Use of machinery

Volunteers are not allowed to use machinery without prior training, correct tickets and approval from GWT. Machinery includes brushcutters, chainsaws, tractors, and knapsack packs. Tools such as drills can be used after training provided by your volunteer supervisor. Use of a trailer can only be used with an appropriate UK driving licence. See page 16 for info on using vehicles.

Volunteering in an office

The head office operates a hot desk system. Your supervisor will ensure you have a desk allocated for your day. If you require any adjustments such as a raised screen or wrist rest for carpal tunnel please do inform us.

Pregnancy

Please inform us if you are pregnant so we can ensure we put procedures in place so you can continue to volunteer safely.



Trust Policies and insurance

Public liability

All volunteers are covered by our Public Liability insurance up to 5 million. A copy is available on request.

Motor vehicle insurance

Volunteers over 21 with a full, clean driving licence may use GWT vehicles for business purposes, on and off Trust land. Before using a Trust vehicle a copy of your driving licence needs to be provided, a copy will be stored securely by the GWT. Disclose any medical condition that may impact driving. GWT will ensure the vehicle is road worthy but if you notice a problem please notify your supervisor and do not drive the vehicle until cleared to do so. A copy of traveling on Trust business code of practice will be provided.

Using your own vehicle

We encourage staff and volunteers to use sustainable transport where possible. Driving to and from a volunteer group will be covered by your insurance. If you need to use your own vehicle for additional uses such as transporting Trust equipment or transporting other volunteers between sites then it is advised you check your insurance covers this. You will need to produce your vehicle insurance document and driving licence prior to undertaking driving for GWT business use as a volunteer. For business use you must read GWT's Travelling on Trust Business Code of practice, available via the Volunteer Coordinator.



Conflict resolution & problem solving

Sometimes issues may arise between volunteers or between staff and volunteers that need addressing. Where possible we would like to resolve any issues or concerns raised informally between the parties concerned, however on occasion we may need to start our formal problem-solving procedure. This procedure is important as it ensures fairness between all volunteers. If as a volunteer you have concerns about another volunteer's or staff's conduct, please inform your Volunteer Supervisor or the Volunteer Coordinator.

Alcohol and drugs

The possession or consumption of alcohol and drugs when volunteering is prohibited. Volunteers must not be under the influence whilst volunteering. If found under the influence the Trust reserves the right to ask you to leave site. If you are in possession of an illegal substance the Trust has the right to contact the authorities.

The data we hold

We will only ever collect, store and use your personal data when we have an identified purpose and reason to do so. The ICO refers to this as a 'lawful basis'. If you are a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust volunteer, we collect your personal data so that we can keep in touch with you, for example:

- Changes to planned volunteer work programmes that you may be taking part in
- The positive impact you have on our work, by sending you our volunteer newsletter
- Dedicated volunteer thank-you events
- Details of other volunteering opportunities

Your data will be held securely and you can request to see what information we hold about you at anytime, ask to stop being contacted by the Trust and have your details removed. As a volunteer we may hold the following information:

- Name
- Address
- Phone numbers
- Email
- Medical details
- Emergency contact details

View our full privacy policy [here](#)



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Safeguarding

GWT is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults engaged in the breadth of its activities. GWT acknowledges its duty to act appropriately to any allegations, reports or suspicions of abuse or neglect. Volunteers working with these groups will be appropriately trained. DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks will be taken out for volunteers spending time regularly with vulnerable people if it constitutes a 'regulated activity'. We will always ensure volunteers are working with staff or with another volunteer and never alone. A copy of our safeguarding policy can be sent on request by the Volunteer Coordinator.









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