Volunteer Handbook

Welcome to the team
Welcome
from Dr Tony Whitbread,
Chief Executive

Sussex Wildlife Trust was started by volunteers in 1961 and is now the largest nature conservation organisation protecting the wildlife and countryside of Sussex. Volunteers are integral to our success and we can only deliver the level of work we do because of you.

There are lots of ways that you can volunteer for Sussex Wildlife Trust – whether you want to get outdoors and into the wild, work with groups of children and young people or help out in an office environment. However you choose to help us you will receive a warm welcome from our staff and other volunteers who will all be keen to make you feel part of our team.

Thank you for offering your time and expertise, it is much appreciated.

About us

The Sussex Wildlife Trust is the county’s leading nature conservation organisation managing over 5,000 acres of prime woodland, heathland, wetland and meadow habitat including some of the finest wild places in Sussex. It speaks out and is listened to on conservation issues in our county influencing decisions of local, regional and national authorities and engages with farmers and landowners to ensure wildlife is not restricted to its nature reserves but can move freely through interconnected habitats and flourish.

It also works with communities and local schools, encourages volunteering with a wide range of opportunities and works with the fishing industry and government towards sustainable fishing practices and designations of Marine Conservation Zones off the Sussex coast.

It runs an extensive programme of courses and community events to help people learn about and enjoy the wildlife in Sussex. Its Forest School, Nature Tots, family events and education programmes are all aimed at connecting children with nature to promote a life-long love of wildlife.

Do look at our website for more information about our work.
www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk

Becoming a volunteer

Please take a few minutes to read this booklet to ensure your volunteering experience is safe, rewarding and beneficial.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask your team leader or one of the Volunteer Development Team who will always be happy to help.
Your responsibilities

What to expect
You can expect a warm welcome at the Trust. You will be assigned a team leader who is responsible for you and they will introduce you to your fellow volunteers and staff members. They will show you what to do and where everything is.

Induction and training
Your induction starts with your team leader explaining all aspects of the role. Training and support will be provided to ensure you are happy and confident to undertake your role and if you have any specific training requests please discuss them with your team leader.

Further induction sessions are run by the Volunteer Development Team and you will be invited to a volunteer information evening within six months of starting. This is your opportunity to learn more about our work, receive additional support and training as well as the chance to meet with other new volunteers in a social atmosphere.

As a Sussex Wildlife Trust volunteer you are responsible for the following:

Personal details
Please ensure all your personal details, address, telephone, email and emergency contact details are kept up-to-date. If you need to make any changes just have a word with Liz Francis tel: 01273 497562 who will be happy to help.

On Arrival
On arrival at Woods Mill or any of our other offices, please sign the visitors’ book. If you are on one of our reserves or part of the Conservation Hit Squad your team leader will note your attendance.

We value the time you are giving us and want to appreciate just how often you volunteer. Your team leader will keep a record of your hours but it’s important to ‘sign in’ as this ensures we comply with health and safety obligations.

Your health
Your health is important to us and it is your responsibility to alert a member of staff or your team leader to any medical conditions that may be relevant. A copy of your registration form, including any medical conditions and who to contact in an emergency, is held securely on file at Woods Mill and accessed by your team leader only in an emergency.

Please update us of any changes to your health so that your volunteering can continue to be a safe, rewarding and a positive experience.

Holidays and illness
We appreciate that everyone needs time off. Please let us know with as much notice as possible when you are planning to take a break from volunteering so we can forward plan our activities. Equally, if you are unwell, please call your team leader or the Volunteer Development Team.

Expenses
We can reimburse travelling (up to a maximum of a 40 mile return journey) and, in some cases, other out of pocket expenses as a result of your volunteering. These must be agreed in advance by your team leader.

Not everyone claims expenses but this is your decision as we do not wish to place any financial hardship on our volunteers.

Please claim authorised expenses monthly or quarterly on a volunteer expense form which you can ask Liz Francis for. Please attach all tickets and receipts to the completed volunteer expense form (except mileage claims). Once completed, you should pass it to your team leader for processing.

Your team leader will then pass it on to our Finance Team. When claiming expenses for the first time, you will also need to complete a BACS request form so that we can reimburse expenses straight into your bank account.

End of volunteer placement
Should you decide to stop volunteering please inform your team leader.

We value the time you have given and will ask you to complete an exit and evaluation questionnaire so we can continue to develop our volunteering programme and amend our records.

This information ensures we have an accurate record of volunteer activity as well as providing us with a greater understanding of your experience as a Sussex Wildlife Trust volunteer.
Health & Safety

Health and Safety is everyone’s responsibility.
The Trust is committed to looking after the health, safety and wellbeing of everyone who volunteers for us. Any activities carried out on a voluntary basis are covered by the same health and safety legislative requirements as those carried out by staff. It is therefore important that you understand and accept your personal responsibility towards promoting and maintaining health and safety standards in order to provide a safe working environment for all.

Please take a few minutes to read our General Code of Practice below. Your team leader will be able to brief you on the relevant working instructions pertinent to your role.

Full details are provided in our Health and Safety Policy which will be sent to you when you register to become a volunteer. The Health and Safety Working Instructions will be given to you if applicable to the tasks you are taking on.

General Code of Practice
Whilst at work all staff and volunteers must:

- Take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work
- Must co-operate with the staff to make the workplace safe

Tools and Equipment

- No-one may use or operate any tools, equipment, machinery or vehicles unless they have been trained to do so
- No-one may use any tool, equipment, machinery or vehicle while under the influence of drugs or alcohol

Fire Procedures

In an office
Fire drill procedure notices are displayed in all offices. All staff and volunteers are required to ensure they know what to do in the event of a fire. Only trained members of staff should use a fire extinguisher.

On our nature reserves
Natural hazards occur on our nature reserves and your team leader will alert you to the risks. Those nature reserves that are highlighted as at more risk e.g. heathland sites have a Fire Plan that has been agreed with the relevant Fire Authority and is included in the Management Plan.

First Aid
First Aid kits are available at all Trust locations and should always be available at any event. There are appointed first aiders at Woods Mill, Southerham, Seven Sisters and Rye Harbour nature reserve. No work parties can take place on any of our nature reserves unless a trained first aider is present. A First Aid kit is kept in each of the Trust’s vehicles.

The Trust also supplies a barrier kit as a supplement to all First Aid kits. It contains plastic gloves and apron, which should be used when dealing with any bodily fluids at all times for the prevention of contact in case of blood-borne diseases (HIV. Hepatitis B).

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Loneworkers are defined as those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision in locations away from regular contact with other people. No volunteer should be placed or place themselves in a position of lone working without prior knowledge of their team leader.

Lone Workers, Volunteer Reserve Managers, Wardens or Lookers

Volunteer Reserve Managers (VRM), Volunteer Reserve Wardens (VRW) and lookers often undertake tasks when alone. These tasks should only proceed if they have been risk assessed or deemed as low risk. Please discuss with your team leader what is considered low risk.

VRMs, VRWs, Lookers and similar roles must inform a suitable person/buddy (e.g. spouse, partner, someone who lives with them or reserve officer) when going out onto the reserve alone and also on their return home. If a VRM/VRW or Looker fails to report back on or after the specified time, then their ‘buddy’ should contact the reserve officer so follow up procedure is actioned.

All VRMs and VRWs will be given up-to-date contact details for the Reserve Officers and the Head of Land Management to use in the event of an emergency.

The Trust provides Health and Safety Working Instructions section 19 which lays down the procedures that the Trust has put in place for staff and volunteers who work alone. Volunteers who are lone workers must ensure they have read this section.

For ‘practical conservation’ volunteers, a copy of the registration form will be held by the activity leader for use on site in the event of an emergency.
Other Policies and Procedures

Confidentiality
As a Trust volunteer you may become party to information of a confidential nature and your discretion is essential. If you have any doubt about an appropriate course of action or statement, it is essential that you speak with your team leader about it.

The Trust’s email, internet and telephone systems are only to be used for business purposes. Misuse of the Trust’s systems will be regarded as misconduct and will therefore be dealt with in line with the Trust’s IT Policy.

Data protection
The Trust needs to gather and use certain information about individuals, including members, volunteers, business contacts, staff and other people with whom we have a relationship.

Volunteers are asked to ensure they have read our Data Protection Policy which describes how such personal data must be collected, handled and stored to meet the Trust’s data protection standards and to comply with Data Protection legislation.

All volunteer details are kept under strict control within our database network. You will be given a copy of the Data Protection Policy when you start.

Dealing with difficulties, problem solving and grievance procedures
We aim to make all volunteering experiences positive and enjoyable and to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. We encourage frequent two-way communications as a means of preventing problems before they arise.

However, we do realise that problems sometimes arise: a volunteer may have a complaint or a complaint may be made about a volunteer.

If you encounter a difficulty with any aspect of the role or the role isn’t working out as hoped, please talk to your team leader as soon as possible for advice and support. Together you should try to work out any difficulties. If this is not possible this shouldn’t be seen as a failure. Speak to your team leader or one of the Volunteer Development Team about finding a more appropriate role, or to find out about other opportunities visit:

https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer

Although dealing with complaints can be difficult, it can give us a positive opportunity to improve the way things are done and provide a better service. If you wish to make a complaint or you receive a complaint from someone about anything to do with your volunteering role with the Trust, please pass the information to the Volunteer Development Manager. We will work together to find resolution to the issue.

If a volunteer has a grievance about their volunteering, every effort will be made to rectify the problem at an informal level. The individual should speak to their team leader regarding their grievance but if this does not resolve the problem, the individual should speak to their team leader’s Line Manager.

If the problem is still not resolved satisfactorily, formal procedures may then be necessary.

A copy of the Grievance Procedures can be obtained from the Volunteer Administrator on request.

Disciplinary Procedures
In the unlikely event that a volunteer needs to be disciplined for misconduct or unsatisfactory actions or behaviour, every effort will be made to rectify the problem at an informal level.

The individual will be spoken to by their team leader regarding the issue but if this does not resolve the problem, formal procedures may need to be started.

A copy of the Disciplinary Procedures can be obtained from the Volunteer Administrator on request.

Diversity
We are committed to a policy of treating all volunteers and volunteer applicants equally and fairly. We will not discriminate against any volunteer on the basis of their age, ethnic origin, race, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability or any other factor unrelated to a person’s ability to carry out their volunteer task.

We will not accept such discrimination by staff or other volunteers. A copy of the Dignity at Work and Equal Opportunities policies are available on request from the Volunteer Development Team.

Insurances
The Sussex Wildlife Trust carries third party insurance cover in respect of volunteers who are undertaking tasks on their behalf, either on Trust property or under direction of the Trust. Further details can be obtained from the Volunteer Development Manager.

The Trust also provides limited personal accident insurance for volunteers; however you are advised to check you have adequate personal insurance cover for your own requirements under your own policies, in respect of any work carried out on behalf of the Trust.

Car drivers – it’s important that if you’re involved in an activity for the Trust that involves using your own car, you must inform your insurers. Your car is not covered by the Trust’s insurance.

Our Thanks
Even if your team leader has not had the opportunity to thank you personally after every event, please remember that Sussex Wildlife Trust does appreciate all your volunteer hours, whenever and wherever you give them. The strength of the Trust is built on the partnership between volunteers and staff, working together for our common cause.

Thank you for choosing to volunteer with the Sussex Wildlife Trust.